



## *Ethnicity and Troubled Ethnic Relations*

**A**lthough the Irish had experienced bigotry and prejudice at first hand in the Irish homeland and in New York, Boston, and other East Coast cities, the relative freedom from such attitudes, and certainly from institutionalized discrimination, in California did not necessarily translate into Irish-American tolerance for other ethnic communities. The notorious anti-Chinese movement in San Francisco, led by the flamboyant Irish immigrant and popular demagogue Denis Kearney, provides ample evidence that Irish racial and ethnic attitudes were no better than those of other Americans during the nineteenth century. Daniel Meissner, in the first essay, traces the parallel patterns of immigration and settlement of the two groups, Irish and Chinese, in San Francisco and analyzes the shifts in community relations following the swings of the economic pendulum. In the second essay, Jeffrey Burns examines the career of the quintessential Irish parish of San Francisco, St. Peter's in the Mission District. The parish's "national" identity, drawn from the Irish ethnicity of the surrounding neighborhood, was reinforced by its dynamic and outspoken Irish pastor, Father Peter C. Yorke. With the demographic change of the Mission in the mid-twentieth century, and the arrival of new Catholic immigrants from Mexico and Central America, the Irish character of St. Peter's would be challenged and ultimately overwhelmed by the new ethnicities. The relations between the dominant but declining Irish community and the Latino newcomers presented a new, if less dramatic form of ethnic contention between the Irish and a rival ethnic community.





## *California Clash*

Irish and Chinese Labor in San Francisco, 1850–1870

DANIEL J. MEISSNER



**G**old brought them all: Americans, Mexicans, Chileans, Native Americans, French, German, British, New Zealanders, Scandinavians—young men, adventurers from every corner of the globe—swarming into San Francisco on their way to certain, instant wealth in the Sierra foothills. Tens of thousands in those early years shuffled down gangplanks to the boisterous, muddy streets of this Pacific boomtown. Pitching tents or shanties on the nearest unclaimed patch of land, they immediately set out in search of news and provisions. A week was usually enough time to lay in supplies, glean a tip or two from the swirl of inflated rumors, and witness enough gold dust being squandered to ignite the “fever” in all of them. Posting a last letter home, they shouldered gear and resolutely struck out for the high country to claim their share of its incalculable riches. Within days, their places would be taken by another shipload of adventurers freshly landed at the bay.

The two immigrant groups who felt the Gold Rush pull most strongly were the Irish and Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Great waves of these peoples crossed the oceans and continents to reach the mining fields of California. Enduring blistering sun, bone-chilling cold, disease, deprivation, swindlers, and violence, they shoveled tons of gravel and washed untold pans of muddy water for the flecks of gold that would take them home wealthy men. Some did make it back after striking it rich, their tales of adventure inspiring the next surge of fortune seekers. The majority, however, were less fortunate. Hard-earned gold dust, which steadily trickled away in the inflation-racked mining camps, flowed during the slack season in the gambling, drinking, and prostitution houses of the cities. As legions of prospectors played out the most lucrative surface deposits, dreams of an early, affluent retirement in Canton or Dublin gradually faded into more moderate aspirations of steady work, good wages, and gradual savings.

Fortunately for disappointed miners, wealth could be achieved more readily in the gold-induced boom economy of San Francisco than in any other city in the United States. Within a few years of the first gold discovery, this swampy backwater on the bay developed into a thriving commercial depot. Instant urbanization created countless opportunities for unskilled labor to level hills, fill tide flats, grade



roadways, lay water and sewer lines, construct buildings, transfer cargo, haul goods, and perform a thousand other jobs requiring only muscle and mettle. Rapid commercial and industrial growth, coupled with frequent labor desertions for new silver or gold strikes, depleted the number of available workers and inflated wages. San Francisco itself became a secondary “gold field” where frustrated prospectors could judiciously mine labor opportunities, abandoning less rewarding jobs for others promising higher wages, better housing allowances, or more suitable work. With a bit of frugality and restraint, urban workers discovered they could still amass an enviable savings and return home, or, as occurred more and more frequently, capitalize a small business and settle down in the city.

Most of the laboring Irish and Chinese who met in the streets of San Francisco had almost nothing in common except their limited skills and a desire to make money. These Irish workers were hard-drinking, politically savvy, primarily East Coast Catholics, seeking escape from the dismal factory life of the north Atlantic seaboard.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese were generally reticent, hard-working farmers and laborers mainly from southeastern China, seeking relief from famine and social upheaval.<sup>3</sup> The two groups were divided by race, language, religion, politics, social customs, and personal habits. They lived in separate areas of the city and associated with different immigrant organizations. However, they found common ground—and a good measure of contention—in the city’s labor market. In times of prosperity, the two immigrant groups coexisted if not on cordial, then at least tolerable terms. However, during periods of economic constriction or depression, competition for work often precipitated hostility and violence. In these more rancorous times, when even the pinched California dream of steady, well-paying work was threatened, each group clung tenaciously to its piece of San Francisco’s prosperity.

This essay will trace the interaction of the San Francisco Irish and Chinese during the mid-nineteenth century and examine how these immigrant groups protected their own interests within an environment of changing social, political, and economic conditions. These conditions are defined in terms of an evolving ethic which gradually shifts from general tolerance for various immigrant groups in mining regions and cities, to a selective exclusion of non-white laborers—particularly the Chinese—from the California workforce. This essay, however, will not directly address the issue of the prohibition of Chinese immigration, which has been thoroughly investigated elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it will focus on Irish and Chinese responses to intensifying labor competition and the measures taken by each group to maintain the livelihoods of their workers, prosperity of their businesses, survival of their communities, and future employment opportunities for their countrymen.

### *Defining the Gold Rush Ethic*

It may be said that nearly all came to the city only as devout worshippers of mammon; scarcely one, to find a home, which might unjustly have been denied him elsewhere. In order to accumulate the greatest heap of gold in the shortest possible time, schemes and actions had often to be resorted to, which nice honor could not justify nor strict honesty adopt.<sup>5</sup>



Every new immigrant to San Francisco arrived with one objective—to become rich, either by digging gold or by acquiring the gold from those who dug it. Whether in the mining regions or cities, the work was grueling and risky, but extremely rewarding for those who persevered. For miners in the gold fields, every minute counted, and they cursed the weather, accidents, sickness, necessary chores, even sleep; for the time lost from the pan or sluice forfeited a few flecks of gold to some more diligent miner downstream. Many succumbed to the hardships, left unburied and unmourned by the living who were too intent on working their claims to linger long over the dead.<sup>6</sup> Others survived but were so “broken in constitution and wearied in spirit” that they returned home, “living spectres of their former selves.”<sup>7</sup>

For still other miners, however, the gold fields were abundantly rewarding. In 1849, an average day’s work yielded about ten to fifteen dollars in gold dust. In some areas, prospectors might abandon sites yielding forty dollars a day to look for yet richer, more promising digs. Documented accounts of claims producing one to two hundred, even seven to eight hundred dollars a day were reported.<sup>8</sup> Two lucky Chinese miners struck it rich in one stroke, when they discovered an enormous 240-pound nugget worth over \$30,000.<sup>9</sup> To recent immigrants accustomed to factory labor at a dollar per day at best, California riverbeds were fountains of potential wealth.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, miners were willing to work through pain and weariness to accumulate as much of these riches for themselves as possible. In August 1848, the *Daily Alta California* accurately captured the optimism of the mining camps and the implied promise of the Gold Rush: “If the means be perseveringly used and discretion be observed, there are very handsome prizes for all, and some very large ones for a few.”<sup>11</sup>

The rapid accumulation of such unimaginable wealth, however, coupled with the peril, deprivation, and isolation of the camps, seriously affected the ethical standards of immigrants living in the newly established mining communities. A new moral code, shaped by the competitive, materialistic, and transient environment of the camps, emerged and spread throughout the region. This new “Gold Rush ethic” was predatory in nature, reflecting the intent of miners to acquire as much gold as possible, in the shortest amount of time, by whatever means necessary before the inevitable end of the windfall. Under the influence of this ethic, traditional mores, honed in the old world or the new, were displaced by principles nearly free of social constraints. The pursuit of gold suspended old standards—trust in family, faith, and frugality—while the acquisition of gold generated new ones—an embrace of self-reliance, avarice, and indulgence.

Far removed from the “restraints of family and neighborhood custom,” prospectors and adventurers espoused the Gold Rush ethic.<sup>12</sup> Miners jealously guarded claims, mistrusted strangers, hoarded gold dust, ignored friends, forgot loved ones, and neglected religious observances. Sober New England farmers, who had scrimped to buy seed the previous year, now casually waged a month’s salary on the turn of a card at the local saloon.<sup>13</sup> A veteran street preacher tirelessly chastised men “frequenting . . . haunts of infamy, who have confiding wives and interesting children at home.”<sup>14</sup> Even grievous misconduct was viewed as legally, if not morally, relative. When asked about the fate of a Chinese ar-



rested for murder “up country,” a fellow countryman responded: “He get free; he no hang. He just same as one Melican (American) man. *He got money.*”<sup>15</sup> Reality, as these recent immigrants had known it, was displaced—at least temporarily—as the Gold Rush ethic pervaded and dictated life in the mines.

Those who survived the mining season packed their gear and gold dust to “winter-over” in the relative comfort of the cities—Sacramento, Stockton, Marysville, and especially San Francisco. Here they discovered that despite the comfortable rooms and diverse entertainment offered in the cities, the atmosphere was not far removed from that of the mining regions. San Francisco was a young, bawdy, unruly, and frenzied city obsessed with money, and as in the camps, dominated by the Gold Rush ethic. The *Era* dubbed it a “fast town” where everyone was “determin[ed] to enjoy life while it last[ed].”<sup>16</sup> Like prospectors toiling at distant claims, entrepreneurs in the city labored to acquire as much money as possible before the gold disappeared and the boom ended. They exploited miners and each other, colluding and conniving to divert the greatest portion of the flowing gold dust into their own pockets. Every businessman faithfully observed the adage hung in the main hall of a San Francisco casino, “My son, make money, *honestly* if you can, *but make money.*”<sup>17</sup> Engaging in any profitable enterprise, no matter how immoral it might be considered “back home,” salesmen offered intemperate, gold-laden sourdoughs every form of diversion imaginable—from sleazy banjo saloons, to gaudy casino brothels, to sultry opium dens. Caught up in the roaring, mercenary economy of San Francisco, “Nobody had leisure to think even for a moment of his occupation, and how it was viewed in Christian lands . . . while a bit of coin or dust was left” for the taking.<sup>18</sup>

The Gold Rush ethic of San Francisco was as irrepressible as it was pervasive. The city’s flimsy wooden structures, muddied and potholed streets, and inadequate sewer and water systems exemplified the rapacious nature of its inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> Ignoring building and fire codes, speculators hastily erected boarding houses, gambling dens, saloons, restaurants, brothels, stores, and liveries to capitalize on the city’s booming commerce and high rents. Shoddy workmanship and general disregard for safety resulted in frequent fires which often decimated entire districts.<sup>20</sup> Before the ashes had even cooled, however, gamblers would already be back plying their trade, “spread[ing] their table in the open street . . . as if nothing had happened.”<sup>21</sup> Undaunted investors reconstructed saloons and brothels within days, and the business of fleecing the miners resumed unabated. Legitimate and shady businessmen, land and loan sharks, professional gamblers, and swindlers of every kind relentlessly “mined” the city’s hapless population. Mirroring the moral decline in surrounding mountain camps, the Gold Rush ethic in San Francisco also suspended traditional mores and values. “In the scramble for wealth,” reported one witness to the city’s degradation, “few had consciences much purer than their neighbors; few hands were much cleaner.”<sup>22</sup>

However, as long as there was sufficient gold for every miner, businessman, or crook to get his “fair share,” the dogged pursuit of prosperity produced only limited antagonism toward others intent on the same goal. Behind the sense of urgency and greed that permeated the mines and cities,



the strong, steady flow of gold soothed ethnic, racial, and class tensions. The abundance of easily mined surface gold acted as a counterbalance to the cold hedonism of the Gold Rush ethic and promoted a guarded acceptance or wary tolerance of diversity.<sup>23</sup> Irish laborers, Chinese peddlers, German farmers, Scandinavian fishermen, British merchants, and Spanish sailors worked—in the relative forbearance of plenitude—the same riverbeds, gulches, wharfs, and warehouses. “The country and city were wide enough to hold them all,” reported one observer, “and rich enough to give them all a moderate independence in the course of a few years.”<sup>24</sup> East Coast and Old World prejudices still generated antagonism; racism still provoked dissension and segregation; fear of competition still evoked conflicts; and tempers still flared over disputed claims, honesty, or honor. But a provisional sense of tolerance suffused this heterogeneous Pacific community. The commentary that “uniform peace and good will go hand in hand with prosperity” applied equally well at this time to the labor markets in San Francisco as to “the mining region o’ Northern California.”<sup>25</sup> That was true, of course, only as long as prosperity and the flow of gold continued. Relative peace, good will, and tolerance, however, would quickly dissipate under changing economic conditions.

### *Chinese and the Gold Rush Ethic*

Quite a large number of Celestials have arrived among us of late . . . [and] scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population. The China boys will yet vote at the same polls, study at the same schools and bow at the same altar as our own countrymen.<sup>26</sup>

This sentiment of welcome and optimism, expressed in May 1852, greeted the first major wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States. In that year alone, over twenty thousand Chinese passed through the customs house at San Francisco—almost all from the same region near Canton in southern China.<sup>27</sup> Some were merchants, businessmen, and craftsmen pursuing profitable opportunities in California’s expanding market for services and trade. Most, however, were laborers, peddlers, and farmers, seeking relief from oppressive economic and political conditions. They were spurred to emigrate by rumors, letters from relatives and friends, and labor circulars distributed in Canton claiming that Americans “want the Chinaman to come and make him very welcome [and] . . . Money is in great plenty and to spare.”<sup>28</sup> Nearly all Chinese emigrants were young adventurers who shared the same ambition of everyone who came to California: strike it rich and return home to a life of ease.<sup>29</sup> As a whole, they worked with exceptional diligence, industry, and enterprise and led a quiet existence in the mining camps and cities. Among a frontier population notorious for coarse and immoderate living, these more temperate qualities set the Chinese apart as much as their unique dress, language, and diet. At least initially, these positive characteristics helped deter racist opposition to early Chinese immigration and facilitated a degree of tolerance among the curious residents of California’s mining regions and cities.

Indeed, Chinese immigrants were perceived by some as worthy additions to American society. In 1850, San Francisco Mayor John W. Geary presided over a public ceremony to present the city’s “China



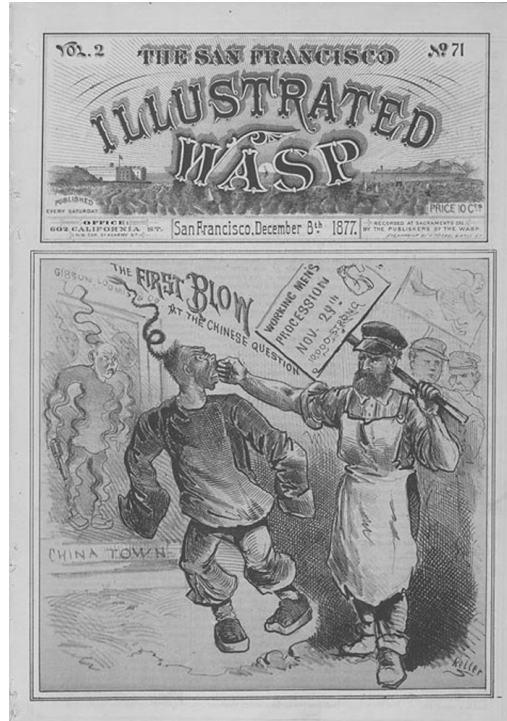
boys” with a collection of Chinese language books and papers. For the occasion, the leading members of the Chinese community dressed in their finest attire and marched into Portsmouth Square, making “a fine and pleasing appearance.”<sup>30</sup> Following speeches and the presentation of gifts, Mayor Geary extended a formal invitation to participate in the funeral ceremonies to be held for President Zachary Taylor—an honor the Chinese readily accepted. The following day, they joined other representatives of various immigrant groups in commemorating the President’s death in a solemn, stately procession through the streets of San Francisco. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese presented Mayor Geary with a certificate of gratitude, stating, “The China Boys feel proud of the distinction you have shown them; and will always endeavor to merit your good opinion and the good opinion of the citizens of their adopted country.” Moreover, they thanked the mayor for the warm reception and hospitality extended to them: “Strangers as they [the Chinese] are among you, they kindly appreciate the many kindnesses received at your hands.”<sup>31</sup> Judging by these early cultural exchanges, pioneer Chinese sincerely appreciated the opportunity to actively participate in community affairs, and San Francisco’s civic authorities genuinely welcomed them as desirable members of that community.

Mayor Geary’s magnanimous inclusion of these leaders of the Chinese community in San Francisco’s civic affairs was surely influenced by the city’s critical labor shortage. During this period of booming economic growth, the lure of instant wealth—literally for the taking in the Sierra foothills—drained cities of nearly every able-bodied man. Sailors deserted ships at port; goods, if somehow transported to shore, languished on wharves for lack of dockhands and draymen. Demand for labor in San Francisco soared, as did wages. A common worker in the city “who had formerly been content with his dollar a day, now proudly refused ten.”<sup>32</sup> Hundreds of ships idled at anchor in the harbor when offers of even one hundred dollars per month could not entice sailors from the mines. Why toil for wages when one good day on a rich strike could buy a plot of farmland or pay for an entire winter of ease? As captivated and convinced by this reasoning as any other immigrant group, the majority of Chinese arriving at San Francisco left almost immediately for the mining regions. However, a number of Chinese remained in San Francisco to take advantage of the inflated wages, earning the acceptance and gratitude of local businessmen and officials. Mayor Geary’s gracious gesture and the *Daily Alta*’s respectful response are examples of the Gold Rush ethic’s racial tolerance at a time when gold was plentiful, labor scarce, and dependable Chinese workers a godsend.

This tolerant attitude, however, would last only as long as gold flowed freely in the mines and cities, and equal opportunity existed for all to gain wealth—a situation which existed only during the first year or two of the Gold Rush. Between 1848 and 1850, the state’s total population was still less than seventy-eight thousand, and fewer than eight hundred immigrants had arrived from China.<sup>33</sup> Following the trail of earlier prospectors, most Chinese set off directly up the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, where they sought promising sites among other immigrants working the placers. White miners viewed with idle curiosity these strange newcomers, uniformly outfitted in blue pants and jackets, wide



FIGURE 2-1 “The First Blow at the Chinese Question.” The Chinese as targets of working-class protests in the San Francisco Bay Area. Photo credit: Cover illustration from *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp*, vol. 2.71 (8 December, 1877).



brimmed straw hats, and oversized American-made boots.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese worked diligently in small groups, kept to themselves, caused little trouble, and were easily driven off rich claims by intimidating white miners. They were more a novelty than a cause for serious consideration or concern.<sup>35</sup> By 1851, however, their numbers had more than quintupled, and curiosity in the mines began to turn to irritation and suspicion.<sup>36</sup> Rich surface deposits were already growing scarce, and the placers

required more work to produce a satisfying return. As early as August 1849, the *Daily Alta* was pessimistically reporting that some of the most promising sites had already been “raked over” and that new miners were “only gathering the leavings of our predecessors.” Nativist and racist grumbling arose in the camps against foreigners, who had “overrun the country, rifling it of its riches, and abstracting forever” its treasures to the detriment of American citizens and the state.<sup>37</sup> As the number of Chinese increased, fingers began pointing at this most physically distinct, most “alien” of the immigrant groups in the mining regions as the root of white miners’ problems.

Already alarmed by steadily rising Chinese immigration figures, white miners were thoroughly shocked by the number of Chinese immigrants entering California in 1852. Nearly twenty thousand Chinese immigrants came ashore in San Francisco over the course of this year, and approximately twelve thousand streamed into the Sierra riverbeds to prospect. Arriving as they did when the mining regions were already overcrowded and tensions increasing, these new Chinese immigrants provoked a rapid change in white attitudes—elevating suspicion to resentment, and resentment to hostility.<sup>38</sup> The early conditional tolerance of Chinese prospectors evaporated as miners in Marysville selectively banned Chinese from filing mining claims in the district. Mining communities in other regions followed suit and lobbied the legislature to increase efforts to curtail Chinese immigration or access to the mines. The California legislature acceded to miner demands, passing or amending several discriminatory laws imposing selective fines or licensing fees on Chinese immigrants.<sup>39</sup> These camp ordinances and legislative statutes proved effective in confining Chinese prospectors to less profitable claims already worked over by white miners.<sup>40</sup> By using their political influence to circumscribe Chi-



nese rights, whites not only successfully reduced competition by limiting Chinese opportunities in the mining regions, but also initiated the process of legal separation and segregation based on race. Thus, under mounting pressures from declining returns and increasing competition, racial tolerance under the Gold Rush ethic had quickly devolved into hostility, discrimination, and exclusion.

The diligence and frugality that enabled Chinese to survive and prosper in the mines proved equally successful in the labor markets of California's cities. The same year that white prospectors were restricting Chinese access to the mines, Governor John McDougal was praising California's Oriental population as "one of the most worthy of our newly adopted citizens."<sup>41</sup> The following year, Henry H. Haight, future governor of the state, warmly welcomed the citizens of "one of the most ancient, intelligent and populous of these nations." Couching his acceptance of Chinese in terms of assuming the "white man's burden," Haight declared, "We regard with pleasure the presence of great numbers of these people among us as affording the best opportunity of doing them good."<sup>42</sup> These speeches by influential leaders of the state indicate that in 1853 tolerance of Chinese still prevailed in labor-starved San Francisco. However, as had already occurred in the mining regions, discrimination and intolerance were not far beneath the surface, and they could quickly emerge if sufficient numbers of white immigrants began settling in the city and competing with Chinese for steady work.

### *Irish and the Gold Rush Ethic*

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 raise against individuals. Catholicity, too, has stuck as firm a root in California as in any part of the U.S. . . . and as probably over a third if not a full half of the population of our state belongs to her fold.<sup>43</sup>

In the mid-eighteenth century, conquistadors and missionaries brought Spanish rule and Roman Catholicism to California. In 1776, a small group of Spanish soldiers, their families, and Franciscan missionaries arrived at San Francisco to construct the area's first mission, San Francisco de Asís—or as it was more commonly known, the Mission Dolores—which became the social and commercial focal point of the small community on San Francisco Bay. The mission provided religious services and education for local Spaniards and Indian converts, who studied Spanish, western customs, trades, and the Catholic religion with the Franciscan padres.<sup>44</sup> Though the missions were dissolved under the Mexican Secularization Act, the baptized Indians and original Spanish settlers formed a core Catholic community in California, which facilitated the settlement of later Catholic immigrants—particularly those of Irish descent.<sup>45</sup>

The Irish were not long in coming. During the early to mid-nineteenth century, political and economic crisis in Ireland spurred waves of emigration to countries around the world, including nearly one million to the United States by 1850.<sup>46</sup> Irish immigrants in Atlantic ports found, however, not



the promised land of opportunity, but rather, increasingly saturated labor markets, prohibitive farmland prices, and debilitating prejudice. Many soon became disillusioned with urban ghetto conditions and set out for more promising inland cities and rural areas.<sup>47</sup> A few adventurous Irishmen drifted as far as California, where they settled and prospered amid the Spanish prior to the Gold Rush.<sup>48</sup> With the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada, the trickle west turned into a torrent. Both residents and newly arrived Irish in the East, set out by wagon, sea, or even on foot for the West Coast, eager to claim their share of California's riches. Similarly, the news of sensational gold deposits drew Irish settlers from England, Scotland, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries, swelling the Celtic population of the state. By 1852, thousands of Irish prospectors were working the mining fields, and over 4,200 first-generation Irish were living in San Francisco.<sup>49</sup>

Some of these Irish newcomers were educated professionals, skilled tradesmen, and successful businessmen, seeking adventure and prosperity in the booming cities of California. They left behind established firms, positions, and careers to seek their fortune servicing the needs of a soaring urban and mining population. The majority, however, were young, unskilled or semi-skilled, farmers and laborers, drawn from Australia and the East Coast.<sup>50</sup> Mustering the capital for their traveling expenses, these young ambitious immigrants abandoned the drudgery of wage labor and set out for California, where they believed every man was his own boss and untold wealth was nearly guaranteed. They were confident that "with the pick and shovel they were a match for any workers under the sun, and their luck was on the average as fortunate as that of others."<sup>51</sup>

Their luck was indeed fortunate, at least for some. In 1844, an Irish rancher and army lieutenant from Missouri, John Murphy, arrived in California with the first wagon-crossing of the Sierra Nevada. Among the first to enter the pristine mining fields in 1848, Murphy moved freely from site to site along Weber Creek and the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers, staking claims at promising digs while continually searching out richer deposits. In his wake, he left a string of work parties composed of native Indians, numbering as many as 150 at one time, to sluice the streams. Within a year, Murphy had amassed staggering profits and tallied his daily take of gold dust not by the ounce, as other miners, but by the pound.<sup>52</sup> "It was said," wrote the noted California historian H. H. Bancroft, that Murphy "had at one time more gold dust than any man in California. On one occasion he brought into San Jose from Calaveras a mule loaded with three hundred and fifty pounds of dust."<sup>53</sup> At fourteen to sixteen dollars an ounce for gold, it did not take Murphy long to quarry his first million dollars worth from the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

Though perhaps not as spectacular as Murphy's, there were hundreds of other such success stories which spurred the tremendous forty-niner stampede to California.<sup>54</sup> Among those rushing to the West Coast were thousands of Murphy's countrymen who, like the majority of newcomers, hoped to quickly make their "pile" and return home "to the wives and families or the friends that they had left in the Atlantic States or Europe."<sup>55</sup> Although many Irish were successful in the mines, few re-



turned home rich. Gold dust flowed like water through Irish fingers in the excessive, reckless environment of the mining camps and cities. Drinking, gambling, and inflated prices drained miners of their earnings nearly as quickly as they could pan it. Picks and shovels sold for from five to fifteen dollars, common wooden or tin bowls for three to seven dollars, eggs for a dollar (and up) each, poor quality sugar, tea, and coffee for four dollars a pound, and whisky from ten to forty dollars a quart.<sup>56</sup> Equally exorbitant prices for firewood, cleaning, and cooking sapped more dust, and the remainder of a day's pay could easily be squandered on a game of cards or a roll of dice. Consequently, prospectors found it difficult to put aside savings even when working relatively prosperous digs. As weeks stretched into months, seasons, and years, forty-niner dreams of instant fortune gave way to a more tempered hope for slower—but assured—accumulation.

But soon, even that more modest hope for eventual wealth began to slip away. Production dipped precipitously after 1852, when a record eighty-one million dollars worth of gold was extracted from California mines. Despite a steady increase in the mining population, the gold yield in 1855 fell below \$55.5 million.<sup>57</sup> Irish and other white miners felt the pinch of competition and turned accusingly toward the great influx of “foreign” prospectors as the cause of declining placer returns. Although comprising one of the largest foreign populations in the camps, Irish immigrants were successful in overcoming anti-Irish prejudice among American and European miners and deflecting nativist hostility onto the Chinese.<sup>58</sup> The tremendous influx of Chinese immigrants at this time (and the potential for millions more to come), combined with their decidedly “foreign” dress, language, religion, and customs, made possible the racial alliance of Irish and other white miners against this common, non-white “menace.”<sup>59</sup> In comparison to poor laboring Chinese immigrants, poor laboring Irish immigrants proved more “American”—despite stereotypes in the United States of their papal allegiance, destitute circumstances, limited skills and education, and dubious morality.<sup>60</sup> As one observer noted, “The English, Scotch and Irish immigrants were also numerous, but their characteristics, although something different, were less distinguishable from those of native Americans [whites] than were the manners and customs of other foreigners.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, white miners accepted the Irish as allies in the deepening struggle to protect their common “nativist” interests in the mining regions—that is, their rights under the Gold Rush ethic to acquire as much gold as possible for themselves.<sup>62</sup> In this time of escalating competition for an increasingly scarce commodity, racial tolerance within the Gold Rush ethic was an inevitable casualty. Tolerance amid plenty gave way to discrimination over shortages, manifested in acts of violence and exclusion against the most visible and least resistant population in the mining camps—the Chinese.<sup>63</sup>

As placer returns declined, many Irish miners left the uncertainty of the foothills for the more steady work available in San Francisco. Here they joined their countrymen who had chosen to seek work or practice their trades in the city rather than face the hardships of the mines. In the booming environment of the Gold Rush era, San Francisco offered both skilled and unskilled immigrants nearly limit-



less opportunities for exceptional gains—opportunities of which the Irish, in particular, quickly took advantage. Among the pool of skilled Irish workers in San Francisco, the success of three brothers, Peter, James, and Michael Donahue, exemplifies the city’s potential for “rags to riches” prosperity. Arriving in 1848 from New Jersey, where the three were trained in foundry, boiler making, and molding, they scrounged cast-off materials to set up a blacksmith shop under a tent on Montgomery Street. This makeshift business grew rapidly from a simple iron-working enterprise into the city’s first iron foundry. Parlaying this initial success into related fields, the brothers constructed “the first printing press, the first steam engine, the first mining machinery and the first quartz mill in California, and the first city gas works and the first street railway system in San Francisco.”<sup>64</sup>

A native Irishman, John Sullivan, who accompanied the Murphys to California in 1844, was another early immigrant who recognized the business potential in provisioning miners. Taking advantage of inflated prices for scarce goods, he established a retail outlet on Sullivan’s Creek in Tuolumne County. With prices for staples in the mining regions exceeding ten times the already exorbitant city prices, Sullivan’s business reaped huge profits, which he judiciously invested in San Francisco real estate.<sup>65</sup> The city’s rapid growth sent property values soaring, and in the process, made Sullivan one of California’s earliest commercial millionaires.<sup>66</sup> In 1849, another Irish entrepreneur, James Phelan, opened a liquor store in San Francisco. Since nearly every sailor, soldier, prospector, gambler, businessman, and laborer in the city imbibed, Phelan’s business proved exceptionally lucrative. Like Sullivan, he reinvested profits in other enterprises and eventually founded the first National Gold Bank of San Francisco.<sup>67</sup>

Phelan, Sullivan, and the Donahues were not exceptions to the rule. Other skilled and professional Irishmen, such as John Conness, Martin Murphy, David Broderick, John Downey, Frank McCoppin, Eugene Casserly, and Michael Cahalan, also prospered during this Gold Rush period and left their marks on California history.<sup>68</sup> Unparalleled opportunity made their success possible. The influx of gold and the crush of immigrants transformed San Francisco within a few years from a sleepy mission town into a major commercial entrepôt. This transformation required the importation or production of all goods, services, and structures necessary for the support of a burgeoning population in a thriving city. Consequently, the door of opportunity was opened wide for anyone with the skills, initiative, or capital to take advantage of the city’s prospects for advancement and prosperity.<sup>69</sup> “The ordinary rates of profit in all kinds of business were very great,” observed one city resident, “and unless the recipients squandered their gains in gambling, debauchery, and extravagance, they were certain in a very short time to grow rich.”<sup>70</sup>

This promise of prosperity held equally true for thousands of unskilled Irish workers in the city. As San Francisco rapidly evolved into a metropolitan commercial center, the demand for manual labor in construction, shipping, warehousing, grading, planking, and hundreds of other skilled and unskilled positions continually exceeded supply. Chronic labor shortages, magnified with each rich strike in the mines, guaranteed high wages for anyone willing to accept work with private companies



or on public projects. Common laborers in San Francisco commanded a dollar an hour in 1849, and skilled workers twice that amount and up.<sup>71</sup> A drayman's daily wage of fifteen to twenty dollars even tempted professional men such as John McCracken, a city lawyer, to take advantage of "downward mobility" to advance his lot.<sup>72</sup> A church musician found it nearly impossible to refuse the offer of thirty dollars per night to entertain customers at a bawdy gambling house.<sup>73</sup> Such phenomenal wages not only provided substantial incomes for city residents, but also acted as a safety net for immigrants, ensuring that disappointed prospectors would not starve or lack the means to earn the return fare home. "If all things fail," an Irish carpenter, Thomas Kerr, noted in his diary, "[I would] take apick [*sic*] in my hand and earn 5 or 6 dollars a day working at the road making."<sup>74</sup>

Employment opportunities remained strong as long as the placers drew the steady stream of immigrants landing at San Francisco into the mountains. As surface deposits played out, however, independent prospectors joined the workforce of hydraulic and quartz mining companies, or increasingly, left the hills for the good steady wages of the cities. After 1852, the continuing rush of new immigrants and the growing numbers of dejected miners swelled San Francisco's population.<sup>75</sup> From a sleepy settlement of about one thousand inhabitants in 1848, San Francisco's population burgeoned to nearly thirty-five thousand in 1850, and approximately fifty thousand in 1853.<sup>76</sup> Despite thousands of successful or disappointed sojourners annually returning home, population figures continued to climb—particularly among the Chinese.<sup>77</sup> Although 5,700 Chinese left California for home between 1854 and 1856, more than 18,000 new Chinese immigrants entered the state during this same period.<sup>78</sup> Most set off for the mining regions, but an estimated five thousand laborers remained in San Francisco to seek work. Similarly, Irish immigrants continued to settle in the city, and by 1870, the number of Irish residents exceeded twenty-five thousand.<sup>79</sup>

As the numbers of skilled and unskilled workers increased in the cities, so also did competition for better or higher paying jobs. The urban employment situation was further complicated by the decline in independent prospecting and a generally slumping economy. Commodities speculation, undercapitalized investments, over-extended credit, and other manifestations of the Gold Rush ethic that had dominated the early growth of the city now threatened its commercial prosperity. As increased agricultural and industrial production began to ease chronic shortages and reduce inflated prices, risky ventures collapsed, dragging down with them many otherwise stable firms.<sup>80</sup> During the Panic of 1855, 197 businesses filed for bankruptcy in San Francisco, resulting in a commercial loss of over \$8 million in unpaid debt.<sup>81</sup> Wages declined under this deflationary cloud, and the specter of unemployment—unthinkable since 1848—descended upon the city. During the fall of 1856, an estimated three thousand jobless were looking for work in the city.<sup>82</sup> Thomas Kerr, the resolute Irish immigrant carpenter in San Francisco, wrote that a dejected acquaintance had given "Calafornia [*sic*] up as a bad job," and complained of his own situation that "[a companion] & I nearly walked the shoes off our feet looking for something to do, but in vain, there are too many here see[k]ing employment."<sup>83</sup>



As labor surpluses mounted, wages continued to fall. In 1854, skilled workers could demand only five to six dollars a day, while common laborers earned just three dollars.<sup>84</sup> Disgruntled workingmen, particularly the Irish, pointed toward Chinatown as the source of San Francisco's labor glut and declining wages. As in the mines, Irish immigrants allied themselves with other white laborers against what they perceived to be the unfair and seemingly unlimited "coolie" labor flooding San Francisco.<sup>85</sup> The Irish-white cause was bolstered in 1854 by Chief Justice Hugh C. Murray's Supreme Court decision which legally classified Chinese as "black," that is, as "contradistinguished from white."<sup>86</sup> Once thus categorized, Chinese were legally denied the right of naturalization granted to all "free white citizens," including the Irish, under the Constitution.

By legally drawing the racial line between Irish and Chinese immigrants, the state Supreme Court officially established the two opposing camps of the emerging labor issue. Despite nativist prejudice, Irish were still regarded as white and assimilable, and therefore included within, if not designated the leaders of, the white workingmen's camp.<sup>87</sup> Regarded as colored and unassimilable, Chinese were derided and abused despite their generally exemplary behavior and work ethic. Following this landmark decision, each immigrant group embarked on a different developmental path determined by the freedoms granted or limitations imposed by the white majority. The Chinese continued to pursue whatever means of success were possible under the Gold Rush ethic in the mines and cities. The Irish, however, adopted a new set of developmental criteria—the San Francisco ethic—the tenets of which directly contradicted those of the Gold Rush ethic. A clash between old and new, Irish and the Chinese, was inevitable.

### *Irish and Chinese Under the San Francisco Ethic*

San Francisco, while it can show so many enduring marvels for its few years, has also wasted much of its means in "riotous living"; but its young hot blood will cool by and by. Then ripened years and wisdom will subdue its foolish levities and more disgraceful vices.<sup>88</sup>

Riotous living under the influence of the Gold Rush ethic epitomized the early years of San Francisco's development. Crime was rampant, as were duels, divorce, suicide, political corruption, and debauchery of every kind. The city flaunted its ribald nature in a profusion of glitzy gambling halls, seedy prostitution houses, and raucous saloons. Over 500 establishments in 1853 sold liquor, including 144 taverns and 46 casinos.<sup>89</sup> The more strong drink poured in the casinos, the faster miners parted with their gold dust at the tables. "I was thunderstruck at the Gambling Houses," Thomas Kerr remarked, "its [*sic*] nothing to see a lot of fellows Coming from the Mines sit down at a table and betting perhaps an ounce on the turn up of a single Card."<sup>90</sup> Flowing from the worn pockets of miners to the brass tills of rapacious merchants or the silk purses of seductive women, gold surged through the commercial veins of the city, invigorating and enriching every commercial segment of the society. Riding the crest of this golden boom, the citizens of San Francisco lived hard and fast—



calculating rents, interests, and profits by the month, not year—in full knowledge that the days of surfeit were inevitably numbered.

The Panic of 1855 was the first indication that the boom was ending. Although this economic slowdown did not bring San Francisco's spectacular growth to a crashing halt, it did deliver a sobering message. The hot-blooded fervor—which had driven the inhabitants of the city since the first gold nuggets were discovered—began to cool. With the realization that the heyday of instant fortunes was drawing to a close, city residents were forced to reassess their personal goals and ambitions and to reexamine the present state and future development of the city. The gold-driven, unscrupulous sojourner mentality of the Gold Rush ethic began to give way to a new set of priorities and principles—the San Francisco ethic. This new ethic elevated personal accountability over accumulation, community enrichment over individualism, and civic responsibility over imprudence. Under its influence, citizens began to eschew short-term predatory practices and adopt a more moderate course of reputable long-term investment. In the process, their goals shifted from immediate accumulation of wealth to established residency, steady employment, gradual savings, and social mobility. Such ambitions were readily attainable within the inflated market for labor in San Francisco. However, the maintenance of relatively high wage labor—with its implicit guarantees of steady savings and socioeconomic mobility—required restrictions on the size of the labor pool. Consequently, the San Francisco ethic also included a “right of exclusion,” which over time, emerged in increasingly virulent forms of racial intolerance toward the Chinese.<sup>91</sup>

By 1854, San Francisco was already shedding its transient “tent city” countenance and adopting an air of permanence, if not impending greatness. The business district, firmly anchored by nineteen banking companies and nine insurance firms, could already boast over six hundred stone or brick buildings. Twenty bathing establishments, fourteen fire stations, ten public schools, six military companies, and two hospitals provided services essential to civic stability, and eighteen churches ministered to the spiritual needs of the city's diverse population. Residents could relax in their comfortable, if not elegant, homes, or enjoy an evening stroll along gas-lit boardwalks. They could dine out or shop at any of sixty-six restaurants, sixty-three bakeries, or fifty-eight markets and attend theaters offering a variety of entertainment from minstrels to operas.<sup>92</sup> San Francisco was quickly evolving into the great Pacific Coast city it was destined to be.<sup>93</sup>

These modern conveniences, institutions, organizations, and businesses reflected and enhanced the powerful settling influence which the San Francisco ethic exerted over all inhabitants of the city—particularly the Irish laboring class. Inherent in this new ethic was the implied promise that the city's expanding commerce and industry would provide long-term, steady employment for skilled and unskilled workers. Furthermore, it implicitly guaranteed that high wages would provide social mobility for laborers, transforming the blue-collar workingman of the 1850s into the white-collar capitalist of the 1860s.<sup>94</sup> For Irish immigrants denied a livelihood at home and relegated to more destitute cir-



cumstances in northeastern factories, San Francisco was truly a promised land—a “poor working-man’s paradise on earth”—where any respectable, hardworking man was assured “not merely of subsistence, but of a competence, and indeed a fortune in the long run.”<sup>95</sup>

This optimism was hard to fault. After the brief mid-decade panic, the economy of the city and state revived, and labor shortages continued to maintain high wages. A maturing San Francisco required thousands of unskilled workers to keep up with commercial and domestic expansion and to meet the demands for improvements in transportation, water, sewer, and gas systems. Between 1856 and 1870, for example, the city spent \$9.75 million on road construction alone.<sup>96</sup> Workers were also needed in the city’s growing industrial sector. Over 200 new manufacturing enterprises employing nearly 1,600 workers were operating in the city by 1860. In many of these factories, wages were as high as 2.5 times those offered for similar work on the Atlantic coast.<sup>97</sup> Irish workers filled many of these positions, took advantage of the high wages, and began to advance. In 1852, nearly half of the 2,560 Irish males employed in the city were laborers. By 1860, the Irish male population had grown to 4,464, but the percentage of laborers had fallen to less than one-third. Conversely, the numbers of white-collar, skilled and semi-skilled blue-collar Irish workers increased over this same period.<sup>98</sup> As promised under the San Francisco ethic, workers were climbing the ladder of opportunity and success: ordinary workers were becoming foremen; foremen were opening their own shops; and the more ambitious were becoming successful merchants.<sup>99</sup> By 1875, the city directory listed a broad range of Irish-owned establishments, including dry goods, grocers, butchers, druggists, stonecutters, carriage-makers, blacksmiths, bookstores, physicians, tailors, and undertakers.<sup>100</sup> Compared to the socioeconomic situation of Irish immigrants on the eastern seaboard, “the Bay Area Irish moved more rapidly from working class to middle class status.”<sup>101</sup>

Steady work, good wages, and an accumulation of savings promoted a more temperate, “homesteader” mentality. The sojourner attitude of the Gold Rush ethic, which had influenced the actions of most early Irish immigrants to California, now began to fade. Rather than returning to families in economically depressed Ireland or the socially depressed northeastern United States, Irish workers began sending for wives, families, and sweethearts with the intention of settling permanently in the city.<sup>102</sup> Between 1848 and 1887, they remitted £34 million to relatives in Ireland, including forty percent in the form of prepaid passages to the United States.<sup>103</sup> Increasingly, women were the recipients of these tickets, and many, direct from Ireland or other Irish communities around the world, sailed for California to find work, be married, or join husbands. By 1860, the once heavily male-skewed Irish population of San Francisco had nearly equalized, with men comprising only 53.4 percent of the city’s Irish-born population.<sup>104</sup> That same year, the Irish population of California surpassed thirty-three thousand, including more than nine thousand residing in San Francisco—numbers far exceeding those of any other white ethnic group.<sup>105</sup>

The influx of women exerted a settling influence not only on Irish communities, but on the city as a whole. In 1854, the common council passed one of the first ordinances to clean up San Fran-



cisco's vice-ridden environment. Although this early attempt to restrict houses of ill repute proved generally ineffective, it did initiate an anti-vice movement which ultimately closed down or forced underground the most blatant of these attractions.<sup>106</sup> In order to improve the safety of the streets and counter the city's notorious crime, the city government in 1856 increased the number of policemen (many of whom were Irish from the police commissioner on down) from 34 to 150.<sup>107</sup> Other efforts to enhance the livability of the city included constructing miles of cobblestone or planked roads and boardwalks; introducing gas lighting, street cleaning, and water and sewer systems; and opening new schools, churches, and hospitals. By 1860, San Francisco had grown into a bustling metropolis of 56,802, and was well on its way to shedding the trappings of its riotous origins and adopting the more refined—but still dynamic—San Francisco ethic.<sup>108</sup>

With steady jobs, stable families, and a more sociable environment, Irish immigrants in San Francisco began to settle permanently in the city. An essential step in this direction was the establishment of an Irish bank. Seeking to enhance the investment opportunities of Irish workers (and to capitalize on their expanding wealth), John Sullivan and other prominent Celtic entrepreneurs established San Francisco's first Irish financial institution in 1859, the Hibernia Savings and Loan Society.<sup>109</sup> From its inception, the bank proved highly successful as thousands of Irish deposited their assets in their compatriots' trusted hands. By 1870, bank deposits in 14,544 individual and business accounts exceeded \$10 million.<sup>110</sup> More importantly for the Irish community, however, the Hibernia bank provided affordable mortgage loans to workingmen. Countering exorbitant interest rates that climbed as high as three percent per *month* in 1859, the Hibernia bank offered loans "well below the going rate" to financially sound residents.<sup>111</sup> Irish workingmen took advantage of these loans to purchase property and build homes in virtually every ward of the city.<sup>112</sup> Due to steady employment, high wages, and the assistance of the Hibernia bank, "one Irishman in every three living in San Francisco owned real estate by the year 1870, a prosperous record unmatched anywhere in America."<sup>113</sup> This represented a tremendous socioeconomic advance for Bay Area Irish, especially compared to the East Coast, where even highly paid mechanics continued to live in New York ghetto tenements.

As their social and economic position improved, Irish settlers strove to enhance Celtic acceptance and standing within the city. In 1860, the Irish Benevolent Society was formed to promote the social and physical welfare of its membership. It offered aid to destitute Irish in the community and sponsored social meetings and outings to strengthen Celtic fellowship, pride, and identity. That same year, the St. Joseph's Benevolent Society was established to care for Irish indigents, and the Irish Fine Arts Aid Society raised funds for fine arts education of relatives in Ireland—an extremely generous gesture toward their homelands for such newly settled immigrants. In the late 1860s, two other benevolent societies, the Hibernia Provident Association and the Irish American Mutual Association, provided relief and aid to its membership and encouraged charity and industry within the community. Numerous other Irish associations opened during the 1860s, promoting religious, educational,



political, and social concerns of Irish citizens.<sup>114</sup> The number and diversity of these institutions reflected the growing commitment of Irish settlers in San Francisco to improving not only the welfare of their own community, but the standard of living of their adopted city. Throughout this decade, then, the Bay Area Irish were playing a prominent role in San Francisco's social development, laying the groundwork for an even more illustrious and more promising future.

To protect their social and economic investments in the city, the Irish sought power and security through their involvement in politics. The large Celtic population of San Francisco, comprising twenty-two percent of the city's registered voters in 1867, assured Irish politicians of substantial support.<sup>115</sup> Given the size of this electorate, it is not surprising that Irish candidates frequently were nominated for office and won election. In 1867, for example, Frank McCoppin captured the vote for mayor of San Francisco, the first Irishman to be elected to such an influential post in a major American city. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, the Irish presence in California politics assured that Celtic interests would continue to be forcefully represented in local and state legislatures. In 1877, Irish political influence reached its pinnacle with the formation of the Denis Kearney-dominated Workingmen's Party of California.<sup>116</sup>

For the Irish who settled in San Francisco after 1855, the promise of steady work, high wages, and social mobility was beginning to be realized in the 1860s. Some workingmen were becoming managers or employers. Some were successful tradesmen or businessmen. Most others believed such economic advancement was assuredly only a matter of time.<sup>117</sup> Many had settled down, purchased homes, and sent for wives and family members. Irish financial, ethnic, and religious organizations fostered community cohesion and growth, and their gains were protected by supportive politicians.<sup>118</sup> Despite their advances, however, prosperity for the majority of Irish settlers rested precariously on the maintenance of high wages for unskilled labor—a situation dependent on steady demand and a limited labor pool. But this situation was seriously threatened (or so Irish workers believed) by the thousands of Chinese immigrants arriving annually at the gates of San Francisco.<sup>119</sup>

Although the San Francisco ethic had proven advantageous to the Irish and other white settlers, it had not improved prospects for Chinese immigrants. After the California Supreme Court decision of 1854 legally defined them as "colored" and therefore ineligible for naturalization, Chinese immigrants lost any real chance for equal justice, acceptance, assimilation, or advancement in California. They could not vote, hold office, attend school, or even testify against whites in court. As a result, they were politically powerless against the machinations of white workingmen who felt threatened by Chinese labor. As the city rebounded from the Panic of 1855, white settlers became more protective of their jobs, homes, and community and turned increasingly hostile to any perceived or potential threats to their prosperity. White workingmen, who less than a decade earlier had consented to equal opportunity and racial tolerance in the mines and cities, now began gathering on street corners to protest the rising numbers of Chinese "coolies" undercutting the working wage. In 1856, the



*Chronicle* poignantly captured the changed atmosphere within the city. “We are no longer a community of friends, whom like adventures and pursuits and a rather rough and checkered life have united in a brotherhood. Distrust has succeeded confidence, coldness has come like an unwelcome ghost between friends.”<sup>120</sup>

Chinese were the “unwelcome ghosts,” and the “coldness” was white callousness—the manifestation of racial intolerance inherent in the San Francisco ethic. In 1860, the number of Chinese in California had reached 34,933 (over 9 percent of the total population), ranking them just ahead of the Irish (33,147) as the largest foreign-born population in the state. Even more disturbing to white settlers than the large numbers of Chinese residing in the state, however, was their continued steady and strong immigration. An average of 5,000 Chinese per year arrived in California between 1855 and 1860 and nearly 5,800 annually between 1861 and 1865.<sup>121</sup> The majority of these new immigrants found employment outside the cities in mining, agriculture, and railroads. But approximately one-third joined the urban workforce—concentrated in San Francisco—as servants, restaurant and laundry workers, produce peddlers, diggers and graders, industrial laborers, or in other unskilled or semi-skilled positions.<sup>122</sup> Increasingly, they came in competition with Irish and other white workers with similarly limited training and skills for available wage labor.<sup>123</sup>

In the early 1870s, labor competition reached a critical point as thousands of Irish and Chinese workers descended on San Francisco following the completion of the transcontinental railroad. The Chinese population of the city rose to approximately twelve thousand in 1870, while the number of Irish-born exceeded twenty-five thousand.<sup>124</sup> The large number of relatively unskilled workers among these two immigrant populations swelled the labor pool and depressed wages. Work that paid one dollar an *hour* in 1850 brought only two dollars per *day* (if lucky) in 1875.<sup>125</sup> White workers complained that they could not pay mortgages or support a family on such low wages and blamed the problem on Chinese, who, they argued, could live cheaply in packed, squalid Chinatown tenements. Irish laborers maintained that a white family required at least four or five dollars a day to meet living expenses in San Francisco, when Chinese laborers—single men, alternately sharing beds in cramped, foul dormitories—could survive on as little as nineteen cents a day.<sup>126</sup> Even the pro-Chinese

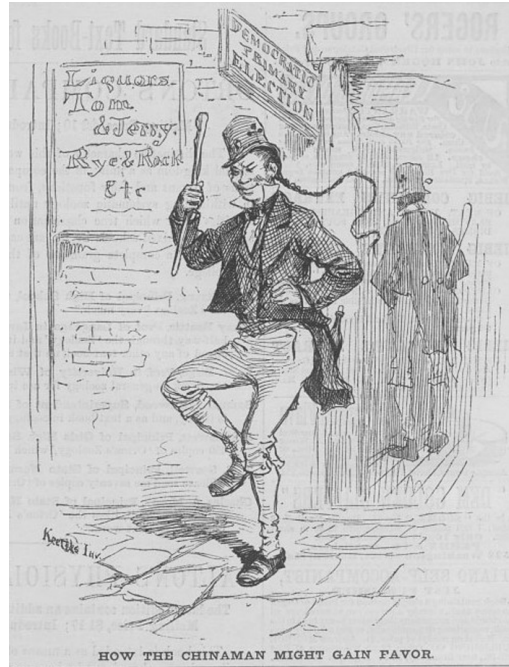


FIGURE 2-2 “How the Chinaman Might Gain Favor.” A barbed commentary by *Harper’s Weekly* employing popular American stereotypes of both Chinese and Irish. Photo credit: *Harper’s Weekly*, vol. 23 (12 April 1879) 296.



Methodist minister Otis Gibson admitted that Chinese laborers could “exist on very little indeed” and manage on “a dollar . . . [or] a dollar and a quarter a day.”<sup>127</sup>

Local employers were naturally attracted to dependable labor at such low wages, and Chinese steadily began taking over many of the unskilled positions in San Francisco. California Governor Frederick Low estimated that the majority of ditch digging and similar public works projects were worked by Chinese because they could be “commanded in any quantity easily at any time” and because “the labor is cheap.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Chinese began filling more and more positions in San Francisco’s fledgling industrial sector. In 1867, Chinese comprised ninety percent of the five hundred workers employed in San Francisco’s cigar industry. In 1877, as demand for the “status symbol” cigar stimulated industrial expansion, 5,500 Chinese were employed at piecework wages that amounted to only \$1.00 to \$1.40 per day. At this wage, most Irish labor was effectively excluded from the industry. Moreover, cheaper California cigars threatened the jobs of Irish cigar rollers on the East Coast, whose higher wages made their products less competitive.<sup>129</sup> In addition to the cigar industry, Chinese labor was in high demand by garment, shoe, and woolen manufacturers. In 1873, eighty percent of San Francisco’s shirt makers were Chinese, who earned approximately \$1.25 per day. That same year, one-half of all boots and shoes produced in the city were made by Chinese.<sup>130</sup> In 1882, Chinese comprised one-half of all workers employed in woolen manufacturing in California, and mill owners argued that they would be forced to close if they employed non-Chinese workers at white labor prices.<sup>131</sup>

Unskilled Irish workers were caught in a tightening vise of falling wages and rising labor competition. Unchecked immigration of Chinese labor, they argued, was limiting employment opportunities, depressing wages, and threatening the future prosperity of white workers. They responded to this threat by organizing anti-Chinese rallies, conventions, marches, boycotts, “anti-coolie clubs,” and violence. They harassed Chinese workers, lobbied businessmen and industrialists not to employ Chinese labor, and urged boycotts of Chinese-produced goods or imports. Mobs threatened non-compliant employers in the woolen mills and attacked a group of thirty Chinese (and their white foreman) employed in grading work.<sup>132</sup> In spring 1870, a mass rally was held in San Francisco against Chinese labor, followed by an angry parade of workers carrying anti-Chinese placards stating their objections and intentions: “No Servile Labor shall Pollute our Land,” “American Trade Needs no Coolie Labor,” and “The Coolie Labor System leaves us no Alternative—Starvation or Disgrace.” That summer, a state anti-Chinese convention was held. Billed as the “first Workingmen’s Convention ever held,” the chief objective of this convention was the suppression of “coolie” labor and limitation of Chinese immigration.<sup>133</sup> The anti-Chinese virulence of these rallies and clubs increased with their numbers throughout the 1870s, culminating in Denis Kearney’s “The Chinese Must Go!” Workingmen’s Party of California of 1877.<sup>134</sup> In most cases, the driving force behind the “anti-coolie” movement was the “Irish immigrant labor politicians [who] led the anti-Chinese movement as a crusade for a white working class.”<sup>135</sup>



To protect their labor interests and preserve future opportunities, Irish leaders of the white workmen lobbied for legislation to discourage, restrict, or stop the flow of Chinese laborers. Since the Irish constituted the largest white ethnic group in the state, and their influence “stretched from the union local and the volunteer fire company through city hall,”<sup>136</sup> local and state governments responded by passing a series of discriminatory taxes and provisions aimed at slowing Chinese immigration. As early as 1855, the state legislature had attempted to discourage Chinese immigration by imposing a fifty-dollar head tax on each passenger arriving at California ports who was ineligible for citizenship.<sup>137</sup> Since nearly all such passengers were Chinese, the act was clearly intended to increase the financial burden for this group, and thus restrict immigration of its less affluent labor class. In more direct, overtly discriminatory fashion, the state legislature passed two bills in 1858 specifically designed to “discourage” and “prevent” Chinese immigration. Although the state supreme court immediately invalidated all of these acts, they paved the way for even more imaginative legislation. In 1862, the state government levied a monthly “Police Tax” on all Chinese over the age of eighteen who were not employed in rice, tea, sugar, or coffee production and not already paying the Miners’ Tax. The official title of this act left no doubt about its proponents or purpose: “An Act to Protect Free White Labor against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor, and to Discourage the Immigration of the Chinese into the State of California.”<sup>138</sup> As the labor situation in the cities worsened with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the state legislature again came to the aid of distressed white workers, approving an act banning Chinese laborers from working on specific public works projects in 1870, and two more laws in 1872 prohibiting Chinese from owning real estate or securing business licenses.<sup>139</sup>

On the local level, San Francisco officials also devised creative responses to the “problem” of Chinese labor. In 1873, the Board of Supervisors passed a variable license fee for laundries, assessing businesses using horse-drawn carts for laundry delivery eight dollars per year and those without horse carts an annual fee of sixty-dollars. Since almost all Chinese laundries delivered by hand, their businesses were disproportionately affected by this taxation. This same selective licensing fee was also applied to vegetable peddlers in the city using carts (mostly whites) or shoulder poles (entirely Chinese). That same year, the Board passed the “Cubic Air” Ordinance, which required a minimum living space of five hundred cubic feet per person in a San Francisco boarding house, a direct attack on Chinatown’s cramped bachelor dorms where most Chinese laborers lived. Although rarely enforced, this ordinance and the discriminatory licensing fees reflected the inventive and vindictive means by which city officials attempted to inhibit Chinese business and restrict Chinese labor.

In order to further deflate Chinese morale, the state and local legislatures passed measures which directly attacked life within the Chinese community. Citing the need to curb vice in Chinatown, the Board of Supervisors passed a law in 1865 authorizing authorities to close *suspected* brothels and impose heavy fines on Chinese running houses of prostitution. Taking these local efforts to a higher level,



the state legislature in 1870 passed an act requiring Asian women to provide character references before entering California ports.<sup>140</sup> Penalties for noncompliance with these laws ranged from heavy fines to imprisonment. Although this anti-vice legislation coincided with efforts to “civilize” San Francisco, the primary intent was clear—to make the city as inhospitable as possible to Chinese men and women.

The objective, then, of all state and local discriminatory legislation was to discourage Chinese laborers from immigrating to California, and failing this, to limit employment opportunities and social mobility, and at all cost, to prevent permanent settlement. In essence, the white residents of California, one-third of whom were Irish or of Irish descent, used their influence and political power to deprive Chinese of the right to pursue social and economic prospects open to other immigrant groups as defined by the San Francisco ethic.<sup>141</sup> The legislation legally denied Chinese access to one opportunity after another—steady work, savings opportunities, a family homestead, social mobility, and civic participation—forcing them to follow the only immigrant option available, the sojourner’s pursuit of wealth under the Gold Rush ethic. Cut off from the white route to success, they were forced back into the work-centered, male-dominated, China-oriented track dictated by the precepts of maximizing income and minimizing expenses. Confined now to their Chinatown borders as much by white antagonism as cultural preference, Chinese workers concentrated on earning (in whatever licit or illicit way possible) savings sufficient to return home to a life of respectable ease. Ironically, having restricted the Chinese to this antiquated “predatory” system, whites then further attacked them for depressing wages, fostering degeneracy, rejecting assimilation, and draining California of its riches.

In order to protect themselves from legal and slanderous attacks and to preserve even the limited rights and freedoms they still possessed, Chinese merchants and laborers formed their own immigrant organizations. In 1854, several traditional village associations, which had previously been established to aid hometown immigrants in San Francisco, coalesced into a larger, more powerful institution called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Popularly known as the Six Companies, this association served San Francisco’s Chinese community as employment agency, charitable society, legal counsel, banking facility, social center, arbitration board, political delegation, clearing house, and police force. Similar to other immigrant associations, the Six Companies served as a mutual aid association—locating housing and employment for new arrivals, providing assistance for sick and indigent residents, and guaranteeing passage for returning citizens. In addition, it functioned as a legal and political organization, opposing prejudicial legislation, promoting merchant and labor concerns, and representing Chinese issues in local and national politics.<sup>142</sup> Comparable to the various private and public organizations established for the benefit of Irish and other white immigrants, the Six Companies offered a comprehensive range of services to assist Chinese immigrants in maximizing their opportunities in this new and increasingly hostile environment.

The overarching goal of the Six Companies was to protect the interests and welfare of the Chinese community, particularly business opportunities for wealthy merchants and the right of free immigra-



tion and employment for Chinese laborers. To achieve this goal, the association hired Colonel Frederick A. Bee as legal counsel to challenge the barrage of discriminatory legislation passed by local and state governments to restrict those rights and opportunities. Colonel Bee, a notable attorney and future Chinese consul in San Francisco, appeared constantly in court to oppose petty municipal ordinances enacted to harass Chinese merchants and workers, or to challenge state legislation impinging on constitutional rights guaranteed to all aliens entering or residing in the United States.<sup>143</sup> Bee and other representatives of the Six Companies repeatedly argued the positive attributes of Chinese immigration before state and federal courts, organizations, and investigative committees. They opposed the workingman's condemnation of Chinese "coolie" labor with tributes from leading, white San Francisco businessmen attesting to the unparalleled economic contribution Chinese had made to the development of California agriculture, industry, and transportation. They countered negative stereotypes of Chinatown's corruption and depravity with testimonials from white employers praising the cleanliness, sobriety, diligence, and punctuality of their Chinese workers.<sup>144</sup> Despite the considerable efforts of Bee and the Six Companies, however, they were unable to overcome the racial intolerance of the San Francisco ethic, which by 1880 had become institutionalized in California politics.

The line separating "colored" Chinese and "white" Irish, which had clearly been drawn in 1854, widened with every downturn in employment or wages. White workingmen blamed the growth of cheap Chinese labor for California's economic decline in the 1870s and were convinced that unrestricted Chinese immigration would ultimately destroy the socioeconomic advancements guaranteed under the San Francisco ethic.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, they intensified pressure on local, state, and national politicians for passage of legislation to protect the future of white labor in San Francisco and California. This time, the issue was settled in Washington. The clash between Irish-led white workingmen and Chinese laborers in California ultimately resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years—a term which eventually was extended indefinitely.<sup>146</sup>

The Irish-led white workingmen's movement against Chinese labor had succeeded. They were free to pursue economic security and social mobility under the conditions of the San Francisco ethic without the threat of competition from cheap Chinese labor. Chinese had few alternatives but to pursue an uncertain fate under the Gold Rush ethic—enduring the regulations and restrictions imposed on them as individuals, a community, and a labor force—in order to accumulate as much savings as possible before the door of opportunity was completely closed and barred against them.

### *Inclusion versus Exclusion*

Thus, in general with but a poor beginning, in a manner friendless, strangers in a strange land, have our people struggled and fought, and been victorious. Their bones will lie far away from the hallowed dust of their kindred; yet every mountain, hillside, and valley in this favoured land will give evidence to posterity of their toil, enterprise, and success.<sup>147</sup>



Although this quotation is attributed to an Irish settler, it applies almost equally well to the Chinese experience in California. Both immigrant groups struggled amid strangers to quarry the wealth and reap the benefits this new land had to offer. In the process, both groups significantly contributed to the settlement and economic development of San Francisco and the state. Many enterprising but unfortunate Irish and Chinese died building a promising future for “posterity.” “Victory,” however, remained the sole possession of the accepted and established Irish, while racial contempt and disdain marred the legacy of the “defeated” Chinese.

The contrasting destinies of these two immigrant groups stemmed from the different developmental paths open to each. During the initial period of racial tolerance under the Gold Rush ethic, California’s abundant surface gold and unlimited business opportunities were open to all immigrants adventurous enough to risk the journey to this remote Pacific outpost. By the mid-1850s, however, declining yields from independent placer mining and diminishing profits from inflation-inspired speculation forced sojourning immigrants in California to reassess their goals. The predatory, hedonistic, and debased activities prevalent under the Gold Rush ethic proved incongruent with efforts to expand commerce, improve agricultural production, and develop urban enterprises, services, and facilities. Consequently, a new San Francisco ethic emerged, promoting civic responsibility, financial security, and social mobility for skilled and unskilled labor. In order to sustain the steady employment and high wages necessary to attain this workingman’s dream, it was necessary that demand for labor continue to exceed supply. Although that ratio was occasionally reversed by temporary economic slumps and labor excesses, the continually expanding population of San Francisco, particularly the conspicuous numbers of newly arrived Chinese workers, threatened to saturate the labor pool and permanently depress wages.

As immigration continued unchecked, competition increased between Chinese and Irish and other white workingmen for steady, unskilled work. Misunderstanding and mistrust between the two ethnic groups grew into animosity and racial antagonism. White workers viewed Chinese, and the millions of their countrymen anxious to immigrate to California, as a direct and potent threat to the San Francisco ethic’s guarantee of economic and social mobility. Consequently, they pressured local and state governments to enact legislation restricting opportunities for Chinese laborers and businessmen. Repressive legislation and racial harassment limited Chinese laborers to pursuit of a sojourner existence under the Gold Rush ethic in Chinatown—a life of bachelorhood, cramped dormitories, hard labor, and limited diversions. Denied the right of naturalization, barred from specific fields of employment, physically and legally harassed in urban occupations, and refused access to open housing and public schools, Chinese immigrants were forcibly denied, rather than willingly rejected, assimilation with whites under the San Francisco ethic.

But was this an inevitable solution to Irish-Chinese labor tensions? Rather than actively opposing Chinese access to pursuit of opportunity under the San Francisco ethic, what might have been the



consequence of “inclusion”—promoting the settlement of Chinese immigrants within the San Francisco community? By allowing Chinese access to social and economic mobility, to purchasing homes, sending for wives and brides, and enrolling children in integrated schools, would they, like the Irish, then have had a greater stake in improving the city and maintaining high wages?<sup>148</sup> Could both groups have achieved assimilation and success? Perhaps this was a proposition too complex (and ultimately, too problematic) for white workingmen, raised with nativist intolerance and racial prejudice and protecting a rare opportunity for a better life, to have seriously considered in the frontier atmosphere of nineteenth-century California. As the largest ethnic immigrant groups in San Francisco, competing for limited resources and opportunities in a dynamic but finite economic market, Irish and Chinese laborers in San Francisco were destined to clash. Inevitably, only one side would prevail.

## Notes

1. The *Eighth Census* lists the total population of Irish (born in Ireland) in California as 33,147 and Chinese as 34,935. Together, these two groups comprised nearly fifty percent of the total foreign-born population of the state (146,528). “State of California, Table No. 5: Nativities of Population,” *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior by Joseph C. G. Kennedy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 34.
2. R. A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 34 and *passim*.
3. Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), chapter 1.
4. There are a number of excellent studies of the movement to restrict and prohibit Chinese immigration. A few of the most comprehensive are Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Eliot Grinnell Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast: Their Legal and Economic Status* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1928); Stuart C. Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785–1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Elmer C. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
5. Frank Soule, John H. Gibson, and James Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco* (New York: Appleton, 1855), 425.
6. Doctors and medicine in the camps were rare, and when available in the city, prices could be prohibitive. In 1849, a doctor’s fee for consultation and prescription in San Francisco was one hundred dollars, and a dose of Laudanum cost forty dollars. Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1947), 20.
7. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 212.
8. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 210.
9. Jack Chen, *The Chinese of America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 39.



10. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 39.
11. *Daily Alta California*, 31 August 1849.
12. David Lavender, *California: A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton, 1976), 63.
13. Col. Albert S. Evans provides a vivid description of the San Francisco gambling houses and miners trying their luck for the first time at the gaming tables. *A la California: Sketch of Life in the Golden State* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1873), 372–373.
14. William Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching in San Francisco, California* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 113.
15. Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 291 [Taylor's emphasis].
16. *Era*, 28 October 1855, quoted in Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 276 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
17. Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 304 [Taylor's emphasis].
18. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 217.
19. A commentary in the *Daily Alta California* indicates the miserable condition of San Francisco's streets: "A horse and cart tumbled into the huge hole in Sansome Street, at the junction with Long Wharf, on Saturday night. This place ought to be filled up immediately." 1 January 1852.
20. According to Helen Throop Purdy, six major fires ravaged San Francisco between December 1949 and June 1951. "Portsmouth Square," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 3, no.1 (April 1924), 38. Herbert Howe Bancroft presents details of these fires, including property losses which totaled tens of millions of dollars. *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, vol. 23 (San Francisco: History Company, 1886), 202, fn 52.
21. Charles L. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush: The Journal of Thomas Kerr," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September, 1928), 402.
22. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 425.
23. Taylor captures both the sense of optimism and tolerance of early prospectors drawn by the Gold Rush: "The great magnet is its [California's] rich deposits of *virgin gold in banks that never fail*, and on which *every man* may draw" [author's emphasis]. *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 282.
24. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 412.
25. *Daily Alta California*, 21 January 1852.
26. *Daily Alta California*, 12 May 1852.
27. Chen notes that prior to World War I, approximately sixty percent of all Chinese in the United States emigrated from Taishan County in Guangdong province (*Chinese of America*, 18). Bruce E. Hall notes that Chinese miners in California sent so much gold back to Taishan during the 1850s and 1860s that it became one of China's most prosperous regions. *Tea That Burns: A Family Memoir of Chinatown* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 19.
28. Quoted in Diane Mei Lin Mark and Ginger Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1982), 5.
29. Among the many excellent studies of Chinese emigration, some of the most comprehensive are Corinne Hoexter, *From Canton to California: The Epic of Chinese Immigration* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1976); S. W. Kung, *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Seattle:



- University of Washington Press, 1962); Ruthanne Lum McCunn, *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories 1828–1988* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Betty Lee Sung, *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989); Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868–1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983); and Kil Young Zo, *Chinese Emigration to the United States, 1850–1880* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).
30. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 288.
  31. McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust*, 38. In Chapter 2, McLeod clearly describes Chinese participation in several civic activities in early San Francisco.
  32. Quoted in Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 214. Chen notes that in 1849, East Coast wages for farmers averaged sixteen dollars per month, and mechanics about thirty-two dollars per month (*Chinese of America*, 39).
  33. The *Seventh Census* reports the number of miners in California as 57,797 out of a total state population of 77,631 (“Statistics of California, Table X: Professions, Occupations and Trades of the Male Population,” *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, compiled by J. D. B. DeBow, Superintendent of the United States Census [Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853], 973). According to statistics presented in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1869*, a total of 773 Chinese immigrated to California during this period (1869; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1965, 532). William Tung, however, reported the number of Chinese in California at the end of 1850 at four thousand (*The Chinese in America, 1820–1973: A Chronology and Fact Book* [Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1974], 8). Bancroft reported that the first immigrants were three Chinese—two men and one woman—who arrived in San Francisco in 1848 (*Works*, vol. 23, 336). The men immediately set out for the mines. Chen notes that as early as 1788, the British East India Company employed 100 Chinese craftsmen on Vancouver Island to construct sailing ships for the Pacific trade (*Chinese of America*, 4).
  34. “The white immigrant, who may never before have met with specimens of the race, involuntarily stops, and gazes curiously upon this peculiar people, whose features are so remarkable, and whose raiment is so strange, yet unpretending, plain and useful” (Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 386). McLeod describes the Chinese affinity for large American boots (*Pigtails and Gold Dust*, 45).
  35. For more details on Chinese in the mining regions, see Stephen Williams, *The Chinese in the California Mines, 1848–1860* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1930; reprint, San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1971).
  36. According to Tsai, the population of Chinese in the United States (almost all of whom resided in California) increased from 323 in 1849, to 447 in 1850, to 2,716 in 1851 (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 22). Bancroft reports the number of Chinese men in California as 787 in January 1850, and 7,512 in January 1851. Five months later, that number had nearly doubled to 11,787. Though the accuracy of these figures is problematic, there is consensus of a rapid increase in Chinese immigration around 1851 (*Works*, vol. 23, 336).
  37. *Daily Alta California*, 31 August 1849.
  38. Published reports list the number of Chinese immigrants as 2,716 in 1851, and 18,434 in 1852 (*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 532). Another 2,317 returned to China during these same years. According to Chen, about one-third of Chinese immigrants in California remained in cities while the other two-thirds worked in the mines (*Chinese of America*, 41). For more information and statis-



- tics on Chinese labor in the mining regions, see Ping Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California: An Economic Study* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), chapter 2.
39. For details on early legislation to control Chinese immigration, see Coolidge (*Chinese Immigration*, 32–52). The California legislature enacted the Foreign Miners' License Tax Law in 1850 in response to the large numbers of Mexicans working the mining fields. The action of the legislature served as a precedent for future anti-Chinese legislation. The Foreign Miners' Tax itself became an almost exclusively Chinese miners' tax after 1852.
  40. Lucile Eaves notes that Chinese working these claims were not generally "interfered with as they contented themselves with working such poor diggings as it was not thought worth while to take from them." *A History of California Labor Legislation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1910), 118.
  41. Tung, *Chinese in America*, 8.
  42. Quoted in Willard B. Farwell, *The Chinese at Home and Abroad: Together with The Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco, on the Condition of the Chinese Quarter of that City* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1885, 10). Ironically, when Haight was elected governor in 1867, he ran on a strongly anti-Chinese platform. For more on the missionary stance on Chinese immigration and the exclusion issue, see Robert Seager II, "Some Denominational Reactions to Chinese Immigration to California, 1856–1892," *Pacific Historical Review* 28 (1959), 49–66.
  43. *Monitor*, 17 April 1869.
  44. William H. Davis, *Seventy-Five Years in California* (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1967), 4. The subjugation of the Native American Indian population of California was not one of peace and good will. Spanish militia herded Indians into the missions, guarded them against escape, and forced them to work Spanish lands as slaves.
  45. For more on the role of Native Americans in California Missions, see Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).
  46. According the *Tenth Census*, the total Irish population in the United States in 1850 was 961,719. U.S. Census Office, Department of Interior, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883), xxxvi.
  47. One of the most interesting narratives of transcontinental "drift" is found in Frank Roney's account of his life as an exiled Irish nationalist, traveling mechanic, and labor organizer. For details of his experiences in Ireland and the United States, see Ira Cross (Ed.), *Frank Roney: Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931).
  48. For details on early Irish traders and settlers in the region, see H. H. Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. III (San Francisco: History Company, 1886); and Thomas F. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers: Irish Leaders in Early California* (San Francisco: Trade Pressroom, 1942), chapters 2–4. For more information on Irish emigration to the United States, see Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America: The Irish and Regional Cultures* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); John F. Maguire, *The Irish In America* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1868; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969) (citations are to the reprint edition); Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).



49. Maguire relates the story of Patrick Clark who walked nearly the entire distance from Missouri to California pushing his cart of supplies (*Irish in America*, 268–269). For estimates of Irish in early San Francisco, see Burchell (*San Francisco Irish*, 3). The *Tenth Census of the United States*, lii, lists the total population of San Francisco in 1850 as 34,776. Soule et al. estimate the city's population at the close of 1850 at "between twenty-five and thirty thousand" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 301).
50. Lotchin notes that one-half of San Francisco's early Irish residents arrived from Australia (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 105).
51. Maguire, *Irish in America*, 270. According to Clark, American construction companies in the nineteenth century hired Irish immigrants to help build the great canal and railroad systems linking the eastern seaboard states with the interior. Relying on picks and shovels, and their physical strength and stamina, Irish workers diligently labored to dig, level and grade the nation's modern transportation lines (*Hibernia America*, chapters 2–3).
52. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 113.
53. Quoted in Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 114.
54. Soule et al. report that during the first year of the Gold Rush, "Individuals made their five thousand, ten thousand, and fifteen thousand dollars in the space of only a few weeks. One man dug out twelve thousand dollars in six days. Three others obtained eight thousand dollars in a single day." Newspaper reporters traveling through the mining areas averaged about one hundred dollars per day. They also note that by the end of 1850, "great numbers of all these sea and land immigrants, after they had been some months at the mines and made perhaps a few thousand dollars, returned by way of San Francisco, to their former homes" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 211, 300).
55. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 402.
56. The *Daily Alta California* "Prices Current" report provides a detailed list of prices for daily products in San Francisco. For prices in the mines, see Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 213.
57. Chiu lists California gold production figures for 1848–1880. Precise figures for gold production in 1852 were reported as \$81,294,700, and as \$55,485,396 in 1855 (*Chinese Labor in California*, 141).
58. Indeed, the sheer numbers of Irish prospectors at this time worked to their advantage. As the largest and most united group, they could successfully oppose nativist attacks, and sway—even dominate—opinion.
59. Theodore W. Allen presents a convincing theory of racial identification for Irish Catholics, who, due to their desperately poor economic and social position, were subjected to severe racial discrimination. After immigrating to the United States, Irish Catholics continued to struggle against ethnic bigotry exhibited by Americans, and to elevate the Irish above the ranks of non-white, poor laborers—in particular, slaves and free blacks. *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One, Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994).
60. For more information on nativist prejudice toward Irish and Chinese, see Saxton (*Indispensable Enemy*, chapters 1–6); and Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian American in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), chapters 1–2. Saxton argues that white miners imposed limitations on mining rights to citizens or assimilable aliens. Since Chinese were not assimilable—a general perception in the early mining regions made official by the California Supreme Court in 1854—and the Irish were, Chinese became the ostracized group and colored "enemy."
61. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 411–412.



62. For more information on racist and nativist attitudes in the United States at this time, see Daniels (*Asian America*, chapter 2, and *passim*).
63. For a comprehensive examination of anti-Chinese legislation in California, see Coolidge (*Chinese Immigration*, chapter 5, and *passim*).
64. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 183.
65. Edwin R. Bingham (Ed.), *California Gold* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 9.
66. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 90–91.
67. For more on James Phelan, see Patrick J. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Publishers, 1988), chapter 7.
68. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, chapter 7.
69. An early San Francisco lawyer, John McCracken, remarked that “the startling chances that are thrown open to confront the industrious, energetic and determined mind” cannot be imagined by those who have never visited the city (Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 296).
70. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 498.
71. Burchell reports the labor rate in San Francisco for 1849–1850 as \$1 per day (*San Francisco Irish*, 66). Soule et al. note that laborers refused ten dollars per day and mechanics rejected twenty dollars per day in 1849 (*Annals of San Francisco*, 214).
72. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 83.
73. Taylor, *Seven Years’ Street Preaching*, 11.
74. Camp, “An Irishman in the Gold Rush,” 396.
75. Soule et al. note, “A fair proportion of the recent immigrants remained in San Francisco, while many who had been laboring in the mines for the previous year or two with indifferent success . . . now visited the city with the view of permanently residing [there]” (*Annals of San Francisco*, 413).
76. Lotchin reports the early San Francisco population as 850 to 1000 in 1848 (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 8). The *Seventh Census* lists the city’s population as 34,776 (*Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, lii). Soule et al. estimate the population of the city at 50,000 in 1853, with about two-thirds “Americans (including British and Irish born—who probably amounted to one-sixth of the number),” or about 5,000 Irish and 3,000 Chinese (*Annals of San Francisco*, 488).
77. The *Eighth Census* lists the population of San Francisco as 56,802. “State of California, Table No. 3: Population of Cities, Towns, etc.,” *Population of the United States in 1860*, 31.
78. Cleveland to Browne, 27 July 1868, states the exact figures as 18,275 arriving and 5,714 departing. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 532.
79. Burchell reports the Irish population in San Francisco’s twelve wards as 25,735 (*San Francisco Irish*, 47).
80. A consummate speculator in early San Francisco trade was Isaac Friedlander, who made—and lost—a fortune shipping wheat to Europe. For more on Friedlander and his role in monopolizing California’s wheat trade, see Rodman Paul, “The Wheat Trade Between California and the United Kingdom,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (December, 1958), 391–412.
81. Chiu records the total debt attributed to these bankruptcies as \$8,317,827, with a net deficit (after liquidating assets) of \$6,838,652 (*Chinese Labor in California*, 4).
82. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 84.



83. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush," 400–401.
84. Bancroft, *Works*, vol. 24, 110, fn 17.
85. Burchell concedes that the large number of Chinese laborers in California, accentuated by their "alien" features and customs, made them an obvious target of nativist resentment. However, he argues that if not for the Chinese, nativist objection to foreign mining and labor would have fallen on the next most populous "alien" population—the Irish. Therefore, an Irish-white alliance against Chinese labor was essential to the preservation of labor opportunities for the Irish, but also necessary to deflect nativist resentment away from the large Irish population of San Francisco (*San Francisco Irish*, 181).
86. Tung reprints the full text of the Supreme Court of the State of California, 1854 decision in the case of *The People, Respondent, v. George W. Hall, Appellant*. (*Chinese in America*, 96–97). Walton Bean notes that Chief Justice Hugh Murray was only twenty-nine years old at the time of this decision (*California: An Interpretive History*, 3rd ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978], 142).
87. For more on the issue of color and Irish inclusion in white Anglo-Saxon society, see Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
88. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 426.
89. Soule et al. quote the *Christian Advocate*, which reported that liquor could be purchased at 537 outlets in San Francisco (*Annals of San Francisco*, 452).
90. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush," 395.
91. Burchell notes that by 1860, as workingmen and politicians were focusing on the Chinese as the root of San Francisco's various problems, "The city forgot its qualms about other immigrants to the direct advantage of the Irish immigrants" (*San Francisco Irish*, 37).
92. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 492. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 288–289. Dowling recounts the experiences of the renowned Irish songstress, Catherine Hayes, who performed to enthusiastic crowds in San Francisco between 1852 and 1854 (*California: The Irish Dream*, chapter 15).
93. Soule et al. note, "San Franciscans can now ask for nothing more on the score of domestic comforts. Their streets and houses are well lighted by a beautiful gas-light; [and] they dwell in elegant and handsomely-furnished houses" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 548).
94. A *Sacramento Union* editorial succinctly summarizes the workers' positive attitude toward economic upward mobility: "The workingman of today is the capitalist of tomorrow." 2 February 1878.
95. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 423.
96. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 21.
97. Burchell gives the exact numbers as 229 factories and 1,564 employees (*San Francisco Irish*, 17). Shumsky notes that this higher wage existed in 12 industries, including foundries, cigar, flour, agricultural implements, lumber, woolen goods, leather, and brick factories (Neil L. Shumsky, *The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991], 49–50).
98. Burchell reports the exact figures as 45.1 percent laborers in 1852, and 32.5 percent in 1860 (*San Francisco Irish*, 54).
99. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 20–21.
100. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40–41.



101. Shumsky, *Evolution of Political Protest*, 57.
102. Lotchin lists a number of reasons why early California immigrants did not immediately send for, or come with, wives and families: uncertainty of mine yields and length of stay; long, dangerous and costly journey; high living expenses; frequent fires; high crime rate; vice-ridden streets; and scarcity of social organizations (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 303–304).
103. Ide O’Carroll, *Models for Movers: Irish Women’s Emigration to America* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990), 17.
104. Burchell notes that the Irish immigration population in California was never as heavily male-dominated as other ethnic populations. In 1852, women already comprised 30.3 percent of the Irish-born population of San Francisco (*San Francisco Irish*, 49).
105. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, xxxii, 34.
106. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 550. Evans relates how strong the gambling environment of the city remained even in the 1870s. However, due to anti-vice initiatives, gambling was forced underground in both the white and Chinese quarters (*A la California*, chapter 12).
107. The increase in the number of policemen was only temporary. In 1862, the number had dropped to 54 (Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 22–23).
108. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, xxxi–xxxii.
109. Prendergast lists Hibernia’s first board of directors as John Sullivan, John McHugh, Edward Martin, J. Horan, D. J. O’Callaghan, C. C. O’Sullivan, Robert Tobin, William McCann, James Ross, N. K. Masten, M. Cody, and John Mell. For more on the formation, expansion, and influence of this financial institution, see Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 199, chapter 26.
110. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 97.
111. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 41–43. Burchell notes that in addition to the Hibernia bank, other Irish lending institutions were also active in San Francisco. Moreover, after 1861, the legislature approved the establishment of homesteading associations which sold urban and rural homesteads to workers for a membership fee and monthly installments. Also see Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40.
112. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 47. Otis Gibson testified before a joint congressional committee in 1877 that the value of houses in San Francisco ranged from \$800–\$2,000. *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877), 424.
113. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40. Maguire reports an even higher incidence of home ownership among the city’s working class: “Almost every working-man whether mechanic, labourer, or drayman, owns the house in which he lives, and the lot on which it stands.” Though probably exaggerated, the number of workingman homeowners in San Francisco was certainly unique (*Irish in America*, 275).
114. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, chapter. 6.
115. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 116.
116. For more on Irish involvement in the WPC, see Shumsky, *Evolution of Political Protest*, chapters 7–8.
117. Cross notes that throughout the 1850s and mid-1860s, “The prevalent opinion among working people . . . was that the workingman of today might become the employer of tomorrow, or at least he might be his own employer” (*Frank Roney*, 229).
118. According to Lee, “[Irish immigrants] were eligible for naturalization and enjoyed access to the legal and political systems. Their concentration in large numbers in urban centers and their eligibility to vote as



- naturalized citizens gave the Irish an almost immediate foothold in American politics at the local level. Irish ethnic political organization stretched from the union local and the volunteer fire company through city hall, and ran deeply through the Democratic Party and the union movement" (*Orientalists*, 70).
119. White labor fear of unchecked immigration of Chinese laborers was heightened in 1868 with the confirmation of the Burlingame Treaty, which guaranteed equal protection under the law for Chinese citizens residing in the United States.
  120. *Chronicle*, 25 June 1856.
  121. The *Eighth Census* lists the Chinese and Irish populations of California, and reports the aggregate state population as 379,994 ("State of California, Table No. 5: Nativities of Population," *Population of the United States in 1860*, 34). Sandmeyer reports the total Chinese immigration for 1861–1865 as 28,814 or 5763/year (*Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 16). Tsai notes, however, that from 1855–1860, 16,339 Chinese (or an average of 2,723 per year) returned to China, and from 1861–1865 12,693 (or an average of 2,539 per year) left for China (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 22).
  122. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 35, 41. Saxton reports that in 1860, Chinese comprised eight percent of San Francisco's population. By 1880, their proportion of the city's population had jumped to nearly 30 percent (*Indispensable Enemy*, 4). An 1868 government survey listed in Tsai reports that about 60 percent of all Chinese workers in California were employed in either Pacific railroad construction (10,000) or mining (13,000) (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 21). For a good introduction to the use of Chinese laborers on the Union Pacific, see Stan Steiner, *Fusang: The Chinese Who Built America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). For an excellent, recent publication on the construction of the transcontinental railroad, see Stephen Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Trans-Continental Railroad, 1863–1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
  123. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*.
  124. Eaves reports that with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, approximately 10,000 Chinese and 2,000 white laborers entered California's cities seeking employment (*History of California Labor Legislation*, 135). Coolidge lists the precise numbers for Chinese residents of San Francisco as 12,030 in 1870 (*Chinese Immigration*, 503). The *Ninth Census* lists the number of Chinese residents of San Francisco as 11,729. Table xviii (401) lists the number of Irish-born residents as 25,864, and the city's aggregate population as 149,473 (U. S. Census Office, Department of the Interior, *The Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*, 3 vols., compendium [Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1872], table xx, 448). According to Chen, during the latter half of the 1860s, one-half of Chinese immigrants were employed by mining companies (*Chinese of America*, 48).
  125. Burchell reports the wage for laborers in 1868 ranged from \$25 to \$50 per month. He also notes, "At the end of the decade [1869] labor was plentiful and wages were correspondingly low" (*San Francisco Irish*, 66, 71).
  126. Philip S. Foner and Daniel Rosenberg (Eds.), *Racism, Dissent and Asian Americans, 1850–Present: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 30.
  127. Testimony of Rev. Otis Gibson, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 423.
  128. Testimony of Governor Frederick F. Low, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 78.
  129. Chen notes that low-priced California cigars forced eastern cigar manufactures to introduce new technology and specialized divisions of labor to compete (*Chinese of America*, 109–110).



130. The percentage of Chinese labor in the shoe industry remained constant throughout the decade. The *Oriental* reports that San Francisco's six shoe factories employed 1,000 Chinese and only 200 whites (13 January 1876).
131. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 111–113. Chiu notes that in the San Francisco woolen industry, “white workers, outside of foremen, were a rarity in the early 1860s” (*Chinese Labor in California*, 90).
132. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 259.
133. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 47.
134. Chen notes that two of the most “potent” anti-coolie clubs were formed in 1876: the United Brothers of California and the Anti-Chinese Union of San Francisco (*Chinese of America*, 137).
135. Lee, *Oriental*s, 67.
136. Lee, *Oriental*s, 70.
137. “An Act to Discourage the Immigration to This State of Persons Who Cannot Become Citizens Thereof” (Tung, *Chinese in America*, 51–52).
138. The tax was set at \$2.50 per month (Tung, *Chinese in America*, 54–56). Coolidge notes that in 1863, the state Supreme Court declared this act unconstitutional (*Chinese Immigration*, 72).
139. Herbert Hill, “Anti-Oriental Agitation and the Rise of Working-Class Racism,” *Society* (January/February, 1973): 47–48.
140. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 51.
141. Burchell reports that Irish (including immigrants and those born in the United States) comprised one-third of San Francisco's total population in 1880, and thirty-seven percent of the city's white population (*San Francisco Irish*, 3–4).
142. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 28–29; Daniels, *Asian America*, 23–26; Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, 8–9; Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 31–38.
143. For a brief example of Frederick Bee's support of the Chinese and the Six Companies, see Foner and Rosenberg, *Racism, Dissent and Asian Americans*, 42–46.
144. For a comprehensive source of information on the positive contributions of Chinese immigration on California's economic development, see *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*. See also George F. Seward, *Chinese Immigration, Its Social and Economic Aspects* (New York: Arno Press, 1970).
145. Burchell notes that after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, labor in San Francisco became “plentiful and wages were correspondingly low” (*San Francisco Irish*, 71).
146. Chinese exclusion proved an embarrassment to the United States during World War II, when our Chinese allies were still legally prevented from entering the country. Consequently, the act was repealed in 1943.
147. Unnamed source quoted in Maguire, *Irish in America*, 279.
148. The immigration history of Hawaii suggests that this indeed might have been the case. For more on settled Chinese communities, see Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, chapter 4.





*St. Peter's Parish in San Francisco*  
The Rise and Eclipse of an Irish Parish, 1913–1964\*

JEFFREY M. BURNS



**I**t is appropriate that the co-patron of the Archdiocese of San Francisco is St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Irish men and women played a major role in the construction of the Catholic Church in the San Francisco Bay area. Six of the seven archbishops have been of Irish descent. Irish and Irish-American men and women have filled the Archdiocese's ranks of clergy, women and men religious. The Irish seminaries of All Hallows in Dublin, St. Patrick's in Carlow and Thurles, St. Kieran's in Kilkenny, and others provided a steady stream of clerics during the Archdiocese's first century. Two of the earliest and most important orders of women religious arrived from Ireland in 1854—the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of the Presentation. Irish lay men and women such as John Sullivan, Abby Parrott, and Peter Donahue provided substantial benefactions for the Church. Irish working-class men and women gave from their modest earnings to aid in the construction of churches, hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions of charity. Historian R. A. Burchell observed, "Once founded, Church institutions needed a continuous injection of funds from the pious to survive. By and large the Irish provided them."<sup>1</sup> More poetic in his description of Irish support was Cardinal Herbert Vaughan of England, who wrote in 1864, "The zeal of the Archbishop [Alemany] and clergy and faithful Irish knew no limits; churches sprang up in conspicuous eminences of the city of San Francisco and in the principal thoroughfares. . . . As soon as the Holy See gave to San Francisco an Archbishop the zealous sons of St. Patrick determined to build him a Cathedral. The wages of the common hodman were two pounds, ten shillings a day; nevertheless while the Catholic with one hand scrambled for wealth, with the other he freely gave to that which is always dearest to his heart."<sup>2</sup>

At every level, the Irish have contributed mightily to the growth and success of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan acknowledged this importance by naming his new arch-

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diocesan seminary, dedicated in 1898, to St. Patrick: “I have placed this work under the patronage of a great Apostle, St. Patrick, not indeed for personal reasons, but because he is the patron saint of a great Catholic race, which has suffered more than any other for religion’s sake—the most devoted, the most generous, the most priest-loving race within the fold of the Church of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

The parish is where most Irish men and women experienced and practiced the faith. While the Irish contributed to many parishes in the Archdiocese, one parish stands out as the premier Irish parish—St. Peter’s parish. St. Peter’s was founded in 1867 in what would become the heart of the Mission District. By 1900, the Mission District was a working-class, immigrant neighborhood peopled primarily by German and Irish families. The Irish working-class quality of the Mission increased with the Great Fire and Earthquake of 1906 that razed most of the downtown and South of Market areas of San Francisco and sent refugees into the Mission, where many eventually resettled. St. Peter’s served as a focal point in the post-earthquake period, serving as a general relief station, providing medical assistance, food, and clothing to the refugees. Historians Robert Cherney and William Issel note, “[from the 1910s] until World War II, many Mission residents were consciously Irish, often consciously working class, and very conscious of being residents of ‘the Mish.’”<sup>4</sup>

What characterized the inner Mission and St. Peter’s Parish between the earthquake and the 1950s was its insulated quality. Urban geographer Brian Godfrey describes the area as having a “tightly knit, highly localized basis of community life.”<sup>5</sup> Long-time parishioner Sister of Mercy M. Petronilla Gaul’s memory of parish life in the 1910s and 1920s reinforces Godfrey’s assessment emphasizing the centrality of the parish in community life: “The parish was the center of activity, and all our lives were tied up in the things that happened there. The families were very close. You knew everyone who went to church regularly.”<sup>6</sup> All social, religious, educational, and psychological needs were met right in the parish neighborhood, as were material needs. Shops up and down 24th Street and Mission Street provided everything people in the Mission could want.<sup>7</sup> Longtime St. Peter’s resident Warren Jenkins referred to St. Peter’s and the Mission as an “encampment”; rarely was there need to venture beyond the parish boundaries. Another resident called 24th Street a “Peterite village.”<sup>8</sup> Local bars such as Pop’s and the Green Lantern acted as neighborhood social clubs, where “everyone knew everyone else.” The St. Francis Creamery, founded in 1918, became a hangout for the non-alcoholically inclined. In short, St. Peter’s and the surrounding Mission neighborhood provided a warm, nurturing place to live and raise a family, an environment seemingly insulated from an outside world which often seemed harsh and cruel. Another former resident of the Mission in the 1940s and 1950s concludes, “We were dominated completely by family and church and we were absolutely secure. Every one of our relatives from both sets of grandparents to each of our many cousins lived within walking distance of each other’s houses. We were Irish Catholics, mostly civil service employees . . . Our neighborhood was our world.”<sup>9</sup>

Part of the security lay in the Irishness of St. Peter’s and the Mission, a quality reinforced at St. Peter’s by a succession of Irish pastors. From 1869 until 1970 all the St. Peter’s pastors were Irish



born and Irish trained, save for one pastor who received all but his final year of seminary training in Ireland. Most significant of the early pastors was Father Peter S. Casey, who was appointed pastor in 1879. Born in County Tipperary and trained at St. Patrick's College in Carlow, Casey remained pastor until 1913. Casey's Irish background and demeanor worked well with his largely Irish congregation. He noted, "The parishioners are practically all Irish by birth or descent, and . . . they hail from almost every county in Ireland."<sup>10</sup> Casey's greatest achievement was the construction of an impressive new church, dedicated in 1886, that ably reflected the growing status of the Irish in San Francisco. By the time of Casey's death in 1913, St. Peter's was operating as an unofficial Irish national parish. Three blocks south of St. Peter's, St. Anthony's had been established as a German national parish in 1893, and in 1912, just two blocks south of St. Anthony's, Immaculate Conception was established as an Italian national parish. St. Peter's was unquestionably the Irish parish.

With the passing of Casey, a pastor perfectly suited to the Mission was named to St. Peter's, Father Peter C. Yorke, who had previously served as Casey's assistant from 1900 to 1903. Born in Galway, Yorke had studied at St. Patrick's College in Maynooth before completing his last year of study at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. An extraordinary orator and writer, Yorke had achieved citywide fame in the 1890s by "vanquishing" the anti-Catholic American Protective Association (APA) as editor of the archdiocesan newspaper, *The Monitor*. His mythic status grew in 1901 as he championed the unions in the teamsters' strike of that year, serving as spiritual adviser and major spokesman and publicist for the strikers. In 1902, he founded and would continue to edit until his death the Irish newspaper, the *Leader*, which avidly supported the movement for a free and sovereign Irish republic. Yorke then, was ideally suited for St. Peter's and the Mission—the defender of Catholicism against hostile attackers, the champion of labor, and the pro-Irish advocate. Yorke was revered by most San Francisco Irish, and he placed his distinctive stamp on St. Peter's parish. Historian James P. Walsh concludes, "Yorke was undeniably one of their [the Irish] own and they gloried in his attack on employers and religious bigots. They liked his style. He was a fighter and they could vicariously share in his victories over the respectables."<sup>11</sup>

From 1900 to 1960, St. Peter's reveled in its Irishness, celebrating Irish culture and nationalism and reflecting an unmistakably Irish ethos. In 1902, the parish sponsored a three-week "Irish Fair" at the Mechanic's Pavilion in San Francisco in which a "miniature Ireland" was created. Each of Ireland's thirty-two counties hosted a booth and presented a display of their region. The fair exhibited "thirty-two sods from the thirty-two counties of Ireland, each authenticated by the signature of the local clergyman."<sup>12</sup> A special newspaper dubbed *All Ireland* chronicled the fair's events. It reported a virtual who's who of the San Francisco Irish who were in attendance at the fair—Mayor Eugene Schmitz and his wife, Mrs. James Flood, the daughters of architect Thomas Welsh, almost every significant Irish cleric in the Archdiocese, and many, many others. On the fifth day of the fair, an *All Ireland* editorial stated the purpose of the fair: "It aims at presenting to the people of San Francisco a clear perspective of the revival, which has brought new hopes and almost forgotten glories of Celtic



FIGURE 2-3 On ceremonial occasions, Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan (center) and Father Peter C. Yorke (second from right) offered the illusion of ecclesiastical harmony before the Irish faithful.

*Photo credit: Archives, Archdiocese of San Francisco.*



history to the Celt, telling him to be proud of his blood, to hold his head high among the peoples of the earth, to feel an exalted pride in the name he bears.”<sup>13</sup> After twenty-four days, this extraordinary Irish festival closed.

St. Peter’s celebration of its Irish heritage did not end with the fair. The parish sponsored frequent Irish cultural events including classes in Irish dancing and music, in Gaelic, and in Irish history. In 1921, parents were encouraged to enroll their children in a Gaelic dancing class so “young Irish Americans may be brought up with the soul that is marching the men of Erin to victory today.”<sup>14</sup> The familiar melodies of “old Irish airs” were common at parish dances and socials. St. Peter’s Schools avidly promoted Irish. “Here the history and language of Ireland will have their place; here will be educated those who, knowing Irish history, will be ready and able to defend the old land from the aspersions of those who know it not, and vindicate the right of Ireland to be honored and revered.”<sup>15</sup>

This promotion of Irish culture was reinforced by several non-parochial Irish organizations that offered similar courses and to which many parishioners belonged: the Knights of the Red Branch, the Irish Volunteers, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and others. The Irish societies provided non-stop social outlets—dances, musical entertainment, and picnics.

The greatest parish and local celebration was St. Patrick’s Day. In the 1920s, because of Yorke’s intimacy with the United Irish Societies, which sponsored the St. Patrick’s Day festivities, St. Peter’s was the focal point of several citywide celebrations. One typical St. Patrick’s Day began with High Mass at St. Peter’s, complete with Gaelic sermon and with the Irish “tricolor” hung proudly in the church beside the American flag.<sup>16</sup> Before the Mass, the Irish societies paraded from Hibernian Hall to the church. The celebration culminated in the evening with a dinner dance featuring Irish music.

What especially aroused the Irish fervor of St. Peter’s parishioners was the cause of Irish freedom. In their battle against Great Britain, Irish republicans had no greater friends than Father Peter C. Yorke and the San Francisco Irish. In 1919, Irish leader Eamon de Valera made a triumphal tour of



San Francisco, ushered around the city by Father Yorke. When the Irish Republic conducted a bond drive to raise funds to assist in its struggle for freedom, St. Peter's parishioners gave freely (Yorke himself gave five hundred dollars).<sup>17</sup> In 1920, the Friends of Irish Freedom, in which Yorke was active, merged with the American Association for an Irish Republic to form the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR). Yorke was appointed California director of the association, and traveled the state stirring up enthusiasm for the cause of Irish freedom. In 1921, a branch of the AARIR was established at St. Peter's. Even St. Peter's High School did its part, sponsoring an essay contest on "Why the United States should recognize the Irish Republic."<sup>18</sup>

Irish nationalism, however, was intimately joined with being a good American. "The cause of Ireland is the cause of America,"<sup>19</sup> Yorke declared. At another Gaelic society meeting, he began, "I come tonight as an American citizen speaking to other Americans."<sup>20</sup> American ideals dictated support of a free Ireland. Yorke's affirmation of his Americanism may also reflect a lingering suspicion in American society of Irish patriotism and loyalty to America.

The Irish quality of St. Peter's went beyond sponsoring Irish cultural and political events; St. Peter's was encompassed by an Irish ethos that combined varied elements of defensiveness, sacrificial piety, and civic involvement. Despite having "made it" in San Francisco by 1920, St. Peter's Irish maintained a defensive attitude toward an American society that regarded the combination of Irish and Catholic as doubly suspicious. The battle with the APA in the 1890s had become an integral part of the collective psyche of the San Francisco Irish. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and the KKK-backed Oregon School Bill did nothing to ease the Irish sense of defensiveness. The Irish regarded themselves as a besieged minority buffeted by such real villains as conniving anti-Catholics, scheming employers, and the false prophets of materialism and godlessness. The struggle was simply a manifestation of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Yorke reminded the people, "The Church of Christ was built as a beleaguered city against whose adamantine walls the gates of hell forever rage."<sup>21</sup> This was preaching the San Francisco Irish could understand.

To remain faithful required sacrifice, and a deep strain of sacrificial piety runs through the Irish ethos. Sin and guilt were realities that had to be expiated through appropriate penances. Prayer was essential, and every Irish child knew his or her prayers. Children were exhorted to "offer up" their sufferings in reparation for their sins. Frequent confession was encouraged. Respect for priests, sisters, and all things holy was demanded. At the name of Jesus, every head would bow. Every action, no matter how small, brought one closer to or further away from God and Heaven. Yorke instructed, "Every deed we do, every word, every thought, has its eternal consequences."<sup>22</sup> The Catholic had to be forever on guard against the temptation and allures of a comfortable life. Yorke confided to his diary, "I think I must scrap the big chair" [his easy chair] as he felt it was leading to a "lack of spirit of sacrifice, mortification, and self control."<sup>23</sup> Longtime parishioner Warren Jenkins recalled an incident from the 1920s that reflects how deeply the ethos permeated Irish culture. While his class at St. Peter's school was praying the



rosary, two big Irish policemen came into the classroom to pick up a youthful offender. When they realized the rosary was being prayed, they stopped, took off their caps, and joined in the concluding decades of the rosary, before hauling the offender off.<sup>24</sup> The rosary was the more important duty.

A corollary to the notion of prayer and sacrifice was the parishioners' devotion and love for the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers, whose lives personified prayer and sacrifice. Both orders won the hearts of countless students for their dedicated teaching in the parish schools. Vocations to both orders were common. The Sisters particularly endeared themselves to the parish for their selfless service during two great traumas—the fire and earthquake of 1906 and the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Prayer and sacrifice alone were not enough. The Catholic also had to know how to defend his or her faith from hostile attacks. To this end, Yorke wrote a textbook, *Apologetics*, that was used at St. Peter's High School. Yorke opined, "As our circumstances require not only the positive knowledge of our religion but also the common objections against it, there is need of emphasizing questions in dispute."<sup>25</sup> The *Apologetics* text filled this need.

Despite the insulated quality of neighborhood life in St. Peter's and the Mission, the parish made its presence known in the city. One final element of the Irish ethos was a deep involvement in the civic life of San Francisco. Yorke, of course, was a major player in civic affairs, but he was not alone. Countless parishioners and alumni of St. Peter's were employed by City Hall. Many worked at civil service jobs; others became part of the police or fire departments. "Peterites," as they called themselves, could be found at every level of civic affairs. Service to the city provided a sure means of advancement for the Irish immigrant community.

### *Yorke the Pastor*

Despite Yorke's penchant for the limelight, he took his pastoral responsibilities seriously, performing what he called "the humdrum duties of the Church's daily life"<sup>26</sup>—hearing confessions, visiting the sick, counseling the troubled, and visiting the school. Though a great deal has been written on Yorke, most writers have neglected Yorke the pastor. Yorke's eulogist in the *Leader* did not: "[Yorke's] chief concern was always his parish. He was the good pastor. He knew his sheep and they knew him. He trained the children to know and love our Lord—to come close to him. He was an inspiration to the young men and women who came under his influence, a safe counselor to the old, and a messenger of mercy at the bed of death."<sup>27</sup> Yorke did know his parishioners—he greeted them each day on his daily evening walk through the parish with his good friend and assistant, Father Ralph Hunt. Yorke was loved by his parishioners, though he was regarded with "awe" by many, especially the schoolchildren.

Indeed, Yorke was held in such esteem by his Irish parishioners that it is difficult to determine where the man ends and where the myth begins. Stories of his goodness are legion,<sup>28</sup> but Yorke was not without his faults. A man of strong ego, he was quick to take offense and readily engaged in conflict. At various times he sparred with other local Irish leaders—Archbishop Riordan, Mayor and later



Senator James D. Phelan, Garret McEnerney, attorney for the Archdiocese, and Father D. O. Crowley, head of the Catholic Youth's Directory—as well as others. Yorke employed a slashing, confrontational rhetoric that many felt was inappropriate for a priest. Equally as troubling, Yorke did not rise above the racial prejudices of his era, particularly as it pertained to the Chinese and Japanese. Finally, Yorke's attitude toward the laity indicates that he would brook little dissent within his parish. "By divine appointment the clergy rule . . . There is the Church teaching and the Church taught. To the Church taught the laity belongs."<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, Yorke was loved by his Irish working-class parishioners. He lifted them beyond their isolated social position and, as James Walsh notes, "He made them proud to be Catholics."<sup>30</sup>

### *Parish Life*

Three areas of parish life stand out during the era 1913 to 1964: education, liturgy, and devotional life. Integral to the parish, even before 1913, were the parish schools. In 1913, the parish was operating a girls' elementary school with close to five hundred students. The school had been founded in 1878 and was staffed by the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters also conducted a four-year girls' high school, with a separate two-year commercial department in which young women of the parish were taught bookkeeping, shorthand, typing, and other commercial skills. The parish also had a boys' elementary school, founded in 1886 and staffed by the Christian Brothers, which in 1913 had an enrollment of close to four hundred. By 1924, Yorke added a four-year boys' high school, though the enrollment was never very large. The emphasis on the school bore abundant fruit for the parish, as St. Peter's alumni were faithful and loyal participants in and supporters of the parish and the school.

St. Peter's dedication to Catholic schooling was reinforced by Yorke, who had the reputation of being an innovative educator. He was one of the "founding fathers" of the National Catholic Educational Association and served several years as its vice-president. He operated as the unofficial superintendent of Catholic schools in San Francisco, vigorously promoting teachers' institutes and workshops to upgrade the teaching quality in Catholic schools. His successor, Ralph Hunt, was the first superintendent of Catholic schools in San Francisco (1916–1925) and, like Yorke, served as vice-president of the NCEA.

Yorke's greatest contribution to Catholic education was a series of *Textbooks of Religion*, which were adopted for use throughout the Archdiocese. The textbooks were innovative in a number of ways. Yorke was unhappy with the *Baltimore Catechism* because it was ungraded. Yorke corrected this by arranging the material in the catechism according to grade level. In addition, Yorke added scriptural passages and Bible stories, illustrations, and reproductions of classic paintings. Yorke personally tested the lessons in the parish school.

While at St. Peter's, at the request of Archbishop Edward Hanna, Yorke developed a syllabus of religion for high school students to be used in the high schools of the Archdiocese. Again he tested



his syllabus on St. Peter's students. Yorke's syllabus defined the study of religion in archdiocesan high schools until the early 1960s.

St. Peter's stress on education grew in part from its Irish Catholic defensiveness. Catholic schools were necessary because of the nature of the public schools. At their best, the public schools were inadequate because they neglected the central factor in the development of the child, namely religion. At their worst, the public schools were aggressively anti-Catholic. In 1923, Yorke wrote, "The intolerant character of the first public school teachers and the demand that the children of immigrants should be decatholicized before they could be considered good Americans was the rule rather than the exception."<sup>31</sup> Catholic schools were a necessary correction to the aberrations of the public schools.

For Yorke, Hunt, and St. Peter's, the primary duty of the Catholic pastor and the Catholic parish was to provide for the Catholic education of its children. The ideal was "every Catholic child in a Catholic school."<sup>32</sup> Yorke wrote, "The school is as necessary as the church, nay more necessary. You can say Mass in a vacant lot, you can shrive penitents in a barn, but it is only in a well-equipped parochial school that you can preach the word of God effectively . . . to children."<sup>33</sup> Further, he asserted, "The parish school is the cornerstone of the Church . . . [It teaches children] the only lesson of importance in the world—to know, love, and serve God is first and above all the reason for their existence."<sup>34</sup>

Yorke did not limit his efforts to Catholic schools. While close to fifty percent of the Catholic children in the neighborhood did attend the parish school (ten percent above the archdiocesan average), the other fifty percent did not.<sup>35</sup> They too had to receive a Catholic education. When Yorke arrived at St. Peter's, he reorganized the Sunday school program for public school children and placed it under the direction of two Sisters of the Holy Family. As with the Catholic school, Yorke provided the curriculum.

Essential to Yorke's educational philosophy was his belief that the liturgy had an important educative function. In 1901, while an assistant at St. Peter's, Yorke inaugurated what came to be known as the Children's Mass. All the children of St. Peter's boys' and girls' schools were required to attend the 8:30 A.M. Mass on Sunday (in later years, 9:00 A.M.), and "woe betide you if you were absent."<sup>36</sup> To assist the children's understanding of the Mass, Yorke printed a small pamphlet entitled *Hymns and Prayers for the Children's Mass*. The booklet printed the various prayers of the Mass in English, from the prayers at the foot of the altar to the final prayers. Then, while the priest offered the prayers of the Mass in Latin, a reader at the back of the church recited the priest's words in English; the boys and girls, sitting on opposite sides of the church, then recited the responses in English, with the boys and girls alternating lines. The English responses continued until the Sanctus; the children then remained silent until after the Elevation. In addition to the English responses, the children sang appropriate hymns at various parts of the Mass, concluding with a hymn of thanksgiving. The communion hymn was always an "anthem to the Blessed Virgin Mary,"<sup>37</sup> and one hymn was always sung in Latin. To assist with the singing, Yorke printed another small booklet, *Hymns for the Chil-*





**FIGURE 2-4** Father Peter C. Yorke's commitment to Catholic education constituted a major dimension of his ethnic militancy. He wrote textbooks for the children and expounded unionization for their fathers. *Photo credit: Archives, Archdiocese of San Francisco.*

*dren's Mass.* Yorke believed printed materials were essential to intelligent participation at Mass. Each child was required to have his or her "little Mass book" with them at each Children's Mass. If they forgot it, they were given another and charged ten cents.<sup>38</sup>

Intelligent participation in the liturgy was not limited to children. Yorke believed that each parishioner should be able to follow and understand the Mass in Latin with the assistance of a missal. Yorke wrote, "The faithful assisting at Mass are not mere passive spectators, for they too have a real part in offering the Holy Sacrifice. . . . The use of the missal at Mass is to be strongly recommended."<sup>39</sup> One way to involve the faithful in the liturgy was through congregational singing, which Yorke encouraged at St. Peter's Masses. In typical Yorke fashion, he had a hymnbook printed to enable the congregation to assist with the singing at Mass and devotions.<sup>40</sup>

Besides encouraging active participation in the Mass, Yorke sought to provide the people with a rich devotional life. The parish hosted a whole series of devotions based on the liturgical seasons: devotions to Mary in May, to Mary through the rosary in October, to the Holy Souls in November, and special devotions in Advent and Lent. Several devotions were not tied to any one season but were offered throughout the year. Each Sunday the parish hosted afternoon and evening devotions consisting of prayers, sermon, and Benediction. An important devotion was the adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Once a year, Forty Hours Devotions were held, in which Jesus, present in the host, was displayed in an elaborate golden monstrance for forty hours over the course of three days for adoration, prayer, and reflection. More regular was the weekly Holy Hour, usually held on Fridays, which consisted of prayers, a sermon, and concluded with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Other recurrent devotions included triduums and novenas. The triduum and novena were important parts of St. Peter's piety through 1960. By the 1920s, several triduums and novenas had become annual parish events: the triduum (later it became a novena) to St. Anne, the triduum in preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and the school novena to Our Lady of Lourdes. Triduums and novenas could also be used to ask for special favors. For instance, when Yorke fell ill in 1925, the schoolchildren were told, "we



will storm heaven with our prayers.”<sup>41</sup> Part of the storming was a novena to the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux, a devotion then in vogue as a result of the Little Flower’s recent beatification. In addition, triduums were offered for other needs, especially for vocations.

The whole thrust of St. Peter’s educational, liturgical, and devotional programs was to create “practical Catholics,” and to reinforce the close-knit quality of St. Peter’s life, by investing each parishioner with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the parish.

### *Hunt and the Memory of Yorke*

In 1925, the end of an era came with the death of Peter C. Yorke on Palm Sunday. Yorke was succeeded as pastor by his close friend and longtime assistant, Ralph Hunt. Hunt had received his seminary training at St. Kieran’s College in Kilkenny and had served as an assistant at St. Peter’s since 1906. What distinguished Hunt’s pastorate was his promotion and perpetuation of the memory and spirit of Father Peter C. Yorke. Hunt evoked the memory of Yorke as a symbol to unite the parish, as well as to inspire the parishioners to maintain the ideals Yorke held so dear. Hunt’s personal devotion to Yorke is epitomized by the fact that after Yorke’s death, Hunt left the former pastor’s rooms in the rectory untouched for twenty-four years, preserving them as a shrine to his fallen hero. As Father Nicholas Farana, an assistant to Hunt, put it, Hunt “submerged himself in the shadow of his ideal, Peter Yorke.”<sup>42</sup> On a practical level, Hunt sought to maintain the programs begun by his predecessor. As the parish historian in the *Leader* observed in 1931, Hunt “has faithfully maintained the traditions of the parish that were begun by Father Yorke.”<sup>43</sup> The memory of Yorke became an integral part of the identity of St. Peter’s parishioners.

The two most significant developments during Hunt’s pastorate both involved the perpetuation of Yorke’s spirit and memory: the Yorke Memorial Campaign and the Yorke Memorial Mass. After Yorke’s death, friends initiated the Yorke Memorial campaign to raise a million dollars to build a tuition-free Catholic high school for boys in the Mission District. After an initial burst of enthusiasm in which close to \$250,000 was pledged, including more than \$30,000 from the parishioners of St. Peter’s, and substantial pledges from several San Francisco unions and Irish societies, the campaign fizzled out. The money that was raised was placed in trust with the Hibernian Bank as custodian. Though they were unable to raise enough money to build a high school, for many years the money was used to provide St. Peter’s boys with a tuition-free high school education. When the parish high school closed in 1952, the funds were used to assist St. Peter’s parishioners in attending other archdiocesan high schools. This practice began eating into the capital, and in 1961, the remainder of the fund, \$190,000, was used to build a new St. Peter’s elementary school, dedicated in 1963 to the memory of Peter Yorke.<sup>44</sup>

More important was the Yorke Memorial Mass. Begun in 1927, the Mass became one of the major yearly celebrations of the parish, the San Francisco Irish, and the city’s labor unions. Each year on Palm Sunday, the day Yorke had died, various state and local dignitaries, union leaders, members of the



United Irish Societies, schoolchildren, sodality members, and many others would assemble for High Mass at St. Peter's at 11:00 A.M. After the Mass, the whole contingent would make a pilgrimage to Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma to the grave of Father Yorke. At the gravesite, a series of commemorative speeches would extol the life and ideals of Yorke. Such dignitaries as Eamon de Valera, Mayor (and later Governor) James Rolph, Mayor Angelo Rossi, Joseph Scott, and others appeared over the years to give speeches. Each year a St. Peter's student received the honor of reciting the poetic tribute to Yorke, "Rest, Warrior Priest": "The priest with the heart of the warrior bold, rest now for the battle is ended."<sup>45</sup> In addition, a mixture of "sacred and patriotic songs" was sung. In 1938, "Come, Holy Ghost" was followed by the national anthem.<sup>46</sup> The whole proceedings were to recall to mind, as one speaker in 1961 put it, "the lasting fruits of the work of Father Yorke."<sup>47</sup> Beyond merely celebrating Yorke, the memorial strengthened the ties of the groups Yorke represented—the Irish, Catholics, the working class, labor.

The spirit of Yorke, promoted by Father Hunt, reinforced St. Peter's sense of its own specialness. Parishioners referred to St. Peter's as the "Vatican of San Francisco." Even parishioners who had moved from the parish always considered themselves Peterites, regardless of their new parish.

During the 1930s and 1940s, a significant number of Italians became part of St. Peter's, providing the Irish parish with an Italian flavor. Italians had always been present in the parish, but had attended Immaculate Conception, the Italian national parish. However, Immaculate Conception did not have a grade school until 1957, and many Italians sent their children to St. Peter's schools, while they received their sacraments at Immaculate Conception. Nonetheless, involvement in the school drew Italians into St. Peter's parish life.

The national restriction of immigration in 1924 slowed the growth of the foreign-born community in the Mission. By 1936, second-generation immigrants exceeded the number of first-generation immigrants at St. Peter's for the first time in its history.<sup>48</sup> Second and third-generation Italians were less inclined to attend the Italian national parish, and so became involved with St. Peter's. The "Americanized" Italians blended well with St. Peter's stress on education, devotion, and community life. By 1950, the close-knit community of St. Peter's was on the verge of a turbulent era that would disrupt and transform the parish created by Yorke and Hunt.

### *The Transition: 1950–1964*

In 1950, old St. Peter's and the old Mission were changing. The upcoming transition, however, did not seem readily apparent to the Irish and Italian community. The appointment of Father Timothy Hennessy, a graduate of All Hallows Seminary in Dublin and who was described by one parishioner as "100 percent Irish,"<sup>49</sup> to replace the revered Father Hunt, seemed to promise a preservation of the status quo. The parish priorities remained the schools, the traditional devotions, and the maintenance of the spirit of Father Yorke. Above all, the parish would retain its Irish tint, albeit with Italian shadings. Events in the Mission would soon eclipse these well-laid expectations.



An incident in 1953 proved to be a harbinger of the oncoming disruption of parish life. In that year, the traditional parish minstrel show, an annual fund-raiser performed by the students and alumni and directed by a Christian Brother, was picketed by civil rights groups who felt the minstrel show demeaned African Americans. Such accusations seemed unfair to parishioners. The 1950 show program asserted, "Though our cast 'blackens up' in our *Minstrel Melodies*, we have never tried to offend colored people but wish to sing and laugh with them."<sup>50</sup> In reality, a deep, if at times unconscious, undercurrent of racism ran through the Irish community that would be the source of continued problems as the complexion of the neighborhood darkened. Typical of the early 1950s, the Christian Brother felt vindicated when it was suggested that the picketers had "communist connections." However, a gentle letter from the assistant superintendent of Catholic Schools, Monsignor John T. Foudy, advised that it was time for the parish to move on to other types of entertainments and fund-raisers, and the minstrel shows came to an end. One final irony: The patroness of the minstrel shows, chosen in 1948, was Our Lady of Guadalupe. In her honor, a statue of the Mexican patroness was placed in the Brothers' gardens. Unbeknownst to the minstrel players, they had provided an excellent welcome mat for the incoming Mexican and Central American people.

The 1950s brought significant change to the Mission. Postwar prosperity prompted many Irish and Italians to move to the more affluent and newer Richmond and Sunset districts of San Francisco. The move was hastened for many because a freeway was constructed through the eastern part of the parish, dislocating many old-time parishioners. The vacancies created by people moving up and out of the Mission were filled by new arrivals from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Central and South American countries. Hennessy observed in his 1958 parish report, "During the past five years there has been a very large increase in the number of Spanish type families, with a corresponding exodus of families of other national origins."<sup>51</sup> By 1960, thirty percent of the population of St. Peter's was first-generation Latino. As Latinos were over ninety percent Catholic, they made up more than thirty percent of the total Catholic population at St. Peter's.<sup>52</sup>

The pull of the Mission District to Latinos resulted from a number of factors. In the 1930s, a small Latino colony established itself in the Mission, having been relocated from Rincon Hill as a result of the construction of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge. Unlike Latino immigration to other parts of California, San Francisco's Latino community contained a significant number of Central Americans. While the majority of Latino immigrants and residents remained Mexican, large communities of Nicaraguans and Salvadorans existed by 1960. By 1980, the Mexican and Central American communities were roughly equal in size; a new flood of immigrants in the 1980s would tip the balance toward Central Americans.<sup>53</sup>

Like most immigrants, Central Americans came to the United States seeking a better life; many came fleeing the political disruptions and persecutions in their native lands. They came to San Francisco because of the presence of an already established Central American community. The success of



the San Francisco coffee industry had resulted in a number of Central Americans settling in San Francisco for business purposes. By 1930, 3,200 Central Americans lived in the city.<sup>54</sup> When large-scale immigration from Central America began in the 1950s, preexisting family ties made the city the preferred port of arrival. The good climate and low rents of the Mission also made it a good place for newly arriving immigrants to settle.

Unlike in some cities, the Mission district did not experience “white flight.”<sup>55</sup> Rather, the exodus of older immigrant groups from the Mission was gradual, occurring over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. As the exodus occurred, physical conditions in the Mission experienced a progressive decline. By 1965, the Mission was designated by the Economic Opportunity Council as one of five poverty areas in San Francisco. The 1960 census revealed that twenty percent of the Mission residents had a family income of less than three thousand dollars. Unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate housing were growing problems.<sup>56</sup>

The rapid increase of Spanish-speaking parishioners presented St. Peter’s with enormous pastoral problems. In 1950, St. Peter’s was fortunate to receive the services of a Nicaraguan priest, Luis Almendares, who was appointed assistant pastor. Almendares, who had come to San Francisco in 1943, was reputed to be a brilliant speaker with a perceptive mind. He hosted a Spanish Holy Hour on radio, featuring the rosary and a sermon, which was broadcast throughout the Bay Area. The show publicized “Mexican patriotic fiestas”<sup>57</sup> and other news of interest to the Latin American community. Almendares served St. Peter’s until 1958, hearing confessions and providing counsel in Spanish. He began holding weekly devotions in Spanish and yearly, in December, offered a triduum in Spanish in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. While Almendares’ ministry to the Latino community made them feel a part of St. Peter’s, they remained on the periphery of parish life.

Almendares was replaced by a Spanish-speaking priest of eastern European origin, Father Leopold Uglesic, who arrived at St. Peter’s by a rather circuitous route. Before, during, and after World War II, Uglesic survived death threats from the fascists, Nazis, and communists before immigrating to Brazil, then Argentina, finally coming to San Francisco in 1954. In Argentina, he had learned Spanish, which enabled him to replace Almendares. Uglesic carried on the devotions begun by Almendares, placing special emphasis on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He was troubled by the inter-Latino conflicts. Mexicans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and other Central Americans in the parish identified with people from their own countries, from their own villages, but had difficulty mixing with other nationalities. Uglesic offered the Virgin of Guadalupe, whom he called “Reina de ambas Americas” (Queen of both Americas), as a unifying symbol; however, inter-Latino friction remained a problem.<sup>58</sup>

In 1962, St. Peter’s received an additional assistant who spoke Spanish, Father James Casey, a native of San Francisco. In that year, parishioner Isaura Michel de Rodriguez began circulating a petition to request that Father Hennessy initiate a Sunday Mass with a Spanish sermon. Rodriguez had immigrated to San Francisco in 1943, and though living in the Mission, attended Mass at the



Spanish-speaking national parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, located in North Beach. Weary of the trip across town, she pushed for a Mass in Spanish at St. Peter's. Hennessy was not an early enthusiast for the Spanish Mass, preferring to leave most of his dealings with his Spanish-speaking parishioners to his assistant pastors. Hennessy had the typical American attitude—the good American Catholic should worship in English. He asked Isaura, “Why are your people so lazy? They should learn English.”<sup>59</sup> In 1964, Isaura again petitioned Hennessy, sending a copy of her petition to Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken. She wrote, “I told you that most of the Spanish people, adults, they do not speak English at all, and they need to listen to the Word of God in the Spanish language.”<sup>60</sup> She was particularly concerned about the inroads Protestant evangelicals were making in the Latino community. She counted at least nine Protestant churches in the neighborhood surrounding St. Peter's that offered services in Spanish. In addition, she pointed out that St. Peter's monthly first Saturday Mass in Spanish was well attended. With the additional prodding, Hennessy allowed St. Peter's to celebrate its first regular Sunday Mass in Spanish in September 1964. The inaugural Mass was attended by a standing-room-only crowd of over one thousand.

The development of Hispanic ministry and the increased presence of Latinos in the neighborhood did not sit well with many old Peterites who resented the “infiltration” of “their” parish. After Uglesic preached a sermon in Spanish one Sunday, he was accosted by an angry Irish-American woman who reminded him, “This is an Irish parish.” Uglesic tried to explain that the parish was changing.<sup>61</sup> In a similar instance, when aging pastor Timothy Hennessy practiced and recited an announcement in Spanish at Mass, an older parishioner asked, “Why did you give in to them?”<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Irish resentment was limited to words; overt conflicts were generally avoided between old-time Peterites and the newer Latino parishioners. Many Irish who remained in the Mission accepted the increasing diversity of the neighborhood. Others attributed the peaceful coexistence of the groups to Hennessy, who called on the affection he enjoyed with the older Irish community to smooth out relations between the groups, reconciling the older parishioners to the need for Spanish ministry. The hostility of the Irish, however, was not lost on the Spanish-speaking who variously described the Irish attitude as “*agria*” (sour)<sup>63</sup> or their treatment as being put “*a un lado*” (to the side).<sup>64</sup>

Resentment of Latinos was more than mere racism, though some racism was undeniably present. For decades, St. Peter's had prospered as an Irish parish. The spirit of Yorke and Hunt was imbedded deep in the heart of every Peterite, even those who had left the parish. St. Peter's was *their* parish. Now all they had known was disappearing. One old-time parishioner observed that the parish was “alien” to him now.<sup>65</sup> And another reflected on the Mission in general, “The place where I grew up doesn't exist anymore.”<sup>66</sup> Beyond this, Latino Catholics seemed a different species of Catholic. While Sunday Mass attendance and support of the parish were highly valued qualities of the “good Catholic,” Irish-American style, they were not the values the Latinos seemed to observe. Equally as troubling to the Irish was the apparent refusal of Latinos to learn English. The change at St. Peter's struck at the deep



convictions and attachments held by the Irish-American community, which at times seemed to forget its own immigrant ancestry. The conflict was ultimately resolved by simple numbers. By the mid-1970s, St. Peter's was over seventy percent Latino. Any remaining bitterness had passed by the 1980s as the demographic trends continued. By then, many of the non-Latino community who chose to live or remain in St. Peter's did so precisely because of its cultural diversity.<sup>67</sup>

From 1950 to 1964, despite the changing nature of the parish, and despite the developing Latino ministry, Latinos remained on the periphery of parish life, as St. Peter's maintained its Irish-Italian aura. At the very time of transition, St. Peter's had reached the acme of Yorke's and Hunt's parochial aspirations for the school and parish. Like his predecessors, Hennessy made the school a top priority. Unfortunately, during his pastorate, both the boys' high school and the girls' high school were closed, in 1952 and 1966 respectively, as a result of increasing costs, declining enrollments, and competition from archdiocesan-sponsored central high schools. Nonetheless, the parish's commitment to education remained high as indicated by the construction of a new elementary school in 1963.

Traditional parish devotions continued to flourish as novenas and tridiums remained popular. Marian devotions rose in the 1950s with devotion to Our Lady of Fatima and the novena to the Holy Rosary drawing large crowds.

Despite the demographic shift, the Irish and Italian community struggled to maintain the parish they had known. Their efforts were not successful. For the unobservant, the switchover became painfully clear in the fate of the Yorke Memorial Mass. Though the Mass continued through the 1950s and 1960s, the enthusiasm and crowds that had characterized the celebration of the 1930s and 1940s were gone. By the mid-1960s, the numbers had dwindled to a faithful few, who insisted on keeping the celebration at 11:00 A.M. on Palm Sunday. Unfortunately, the 11:00 A.M. Mass was now the Spanish Mass, and no one had informed the Spanish-speaking community that the Spanish Mass had been canceled. As a result, a throng of bemused Latinos attended the Yorke Memorial Mass, honoring the parish hero of a bygone era. After the Latinos sat quietly through the entire Yorke liturgy, in which traditional hymns were sung quietly in English, Father Jim Casey invited the congregation to conclude the celebration with a hymn in Spanish. The congregation exploded into noisy singing "almost taking the roof off the Church."<sup>68</sup> The future of the parish seemed evident.

Despite the travails, St. Peter's successfully made the transition. By 1990, it was the premier Latino parish in the city, and in many ways resembled the early St. Peter's parish. Like the old St. Peter's, the new St. Peter's was an immigrant, working-class parish. It had supported the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the struggle to unionize the migrant farm workers, as well as other union efforts. It sponsored cultural activities and devotions that buoyed the immigrant community. The school continued to educate a largely immigrant student body and prepare them for life in the United States, while at the same time celebrating the immigrant's native culture. Except for the change in immigrant groups, the new St. Peter's was much like the old.



Significantly, it was Irish-American pastors and associate pastors who oversaw the emergence of the new St. Peter's. Pastors James B. Flynn, Thomas Seagrave, Thomas McElligott, William Justice, Jack Isaacs, and Daniel Maguire facilitated the shift from Irish to Latino. Though the parish is now Latino, the Irish continue to exert a beneficial effect on the parish.

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# *Michael Casey*

(1860–1937)

PETER IMPERIAL

**I**f American Labor sought an archetype to represent the evolution of its philosophy from barefisted confrontation to leveraged negotiation, it could choose none better than Michael Casey.

Born in Elphin, County Roscommon, Ireland, in 1860, Michael Casey immigrated to America in 1871 and settled in San Francisco. After driving a team of horses for seventeen years, he, along with John P. McLaughlin, formed Teamsters Local 85 in 1900. In the summer of 1901, Casey led the fledgling union through a violent strike which involved 12,000 teamsters, sailors, and longshoremen and stifled the economy of the entire region for two months. Hostile newspapers labeled him “Bloody Mike,” a pejorative term which, over the course of the ensuing decades, became a term of affection.

As the power of organized labor in San Francisco propelled union men into positions of civic prominence, Casey’s stewardship of Local 85 made him one of the city’s most influential leaders. He served as president of the city’s Board of Public Works for five years, and his endorsement was sought by local office-seekers. But the unabashed self-interest of San Francisco politicians led Casey to withdraw from direct political action and focus his energy on serving organized labor. Henceforth, he dedicated his work to maintaining and improving the conditions of teamsters. In 1912, he was selected Second Vice President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters on the Pacific Coast. He advised Teamsters locals from Seattle to San Diego, navigating through some of the nation’s most turbulent economic times. Respected by employer and worker alike, Casey was a trusted confidant of Teamsters President Dan Tobin throughout his tenure as Vice President, and Casey was a moderating influence on a young Seattle teamster leader named Dave Beck.

Casey eschewed strikes and direct confrontation, his early experiences convincing him that the losses suffered by the rank and file too often exceeded the gains they won. Instead, he pre-

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FIGURE 2-5 Michael Casey (third from left) in celebratory pose with union colleagues. *Photo credit: San Francisco State University Labor Archives.*

ferred negotiation. This philosophy served organized labor best in July 1934 when a bloody general strike paralyzed his beloved San Francisco for four days. Casey's behind-the-scenes negotiations with the civic and business leaders brought an end to the strike. John Francis Neylan, prominent lawyer and editorial policy maker for the Hearst newspaper empire, wrote on the occasion of Casey's death in May 1937: "Old Michael was the greatest single force in 1934 in saving organized labor and winning for the longshoremen the award they got. . . . [A] terrible drive on organized labor was already underway. The steps which he took and the faith men in key positions had in his word were all that saved San Francisco from civil war."



*Vivian Moore Hallinan (1910–1999)*  
*and Vincent Hallinan (1896–1992)*

JAMES P. WALSH

**S**an Francisco's Irish community had its children, most of whom persevered unto eternity little noticed and seldom criticized. The Hallinans were different. They rejected eternity and embraced this life. "It's all you'll ever have," Vince said to his sister when she left home for the convent.

Needless to say, the Irish neighbors watched with growing interest. What they saw progressed from hope into distaste, then from begrudging acceptance to befuddled pride. Vincent and Vivian Hallinan were the Irish subculture's wild and brilliant counterpoints. They punctuated San Francisco's twentieth century by exercising their own provocative freedom—in thought, in word, and in deed. At first, some Irish just thought that they were nuts. Others went further: sinful, disloyal, atheists, and communists. If Vivian and Vincent's 103-year journey embodied their sole entitlement, they did fill it abundantly.

Vincent Hallinan (second cousin of Eamon de Valera) ignored alcohol and vaulted poverty, but retained his family's culture of violence. He celebrated his seventy-seventh birthday by beating three street muggers and then bragging about it. In his 90s, he used his left hand to close his arthritic right fist so he could punch a rival attorney. Through a seventy-year legal practice beginning in 1919, Hallinan claimed the civil and criminal courts as his domain. In each decade, he defended San Francisco's most noted, some said wanton, criminals and undesirables. He gloried in it, proclaiming, "I am not in this for justice. I am in it to win. Just like the prosecution!"

As asides, Hallinan sued and publicly harassed the Catholic Church by contesting an estate case to the Supreme Court. He suffered disbarment and served hard time twice, the most noted was his extraordinary defense of accused communist, longshore union leader Harry Bridges. Then, with progressive and communist support, Vincent ran for the presidency of the United States under Henry Wallace's Progressive Party banner. His vice-presidential running mate was an African American woman journalist, Charlotta Bass. The fact of his 1952 third-party cam-



paign, though obscure, was audacious. Across America, he opposed racism, war, and the military-industrial complex.

Hallinan always earned a good living at the bar, but it was unsteady. His largest and easiest fee was \$1,080,000, a contested will that never went to court. His lowest and hardest was for the Bridges defense against the United States government: \$10,000 for five months of trial work followed by six months in the federal penitentiary for contempt. His client never went to prison.

Vivian was the big and steady money winner. And Vincent was fortunate that she chose him and never cut him loose. She paid his defense costs and his fines. Doing so, she sacrificed the jewel of her holdings, the Clay-Jones Building on Nob Hill, which then commanded San Francisco's highest vista and most breathtaking panorama.

Ed Moore was her Irish-American father, but he graced the family just long enough to contribute his share to the DNA. Vivian never knew him and even used her mother's maiden name, Lagomarsino. Shy and withdrawn, little Vivian created a fantasy life for herself, which at age twenty exploded upon impact with her ardent thirty-five-year-old suitor, San Francisco's reigning attorney. Her fantasy included a large family, independence, and personal power. She was unwittingly encouraged by her rejecting Irish mother-in-law, her husband's short-lived indifference to children, and his fragile title to decrepit depression era apartment buildings in downtown San Francisco. Over the years, she created the Hallinan home, populated it with six highly energetic (some said wild) sons, developed her own real estate holdings to 435 rental units, became a political activist, and wrote her family autobiography (*My Wild Irish Rogues*, Doubleday, 1952).

On behalf of human rights and in opposition to United States policies, Vivian visited Cuba, Chile, China, and Nicaragua. An avid Sandinista supporter, she attended the inauguration of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, charmed Cuba's Fidel Castro, and efficaciously guided humor columnist Art Hoppe through Central America. Fighting racism at home, she protested job discrimination against African Americans by San Francisco's hotel and auto sales industries. For this, she served thirty days in jail. Vivian was the one who drew Vincent into opposition to the Korean War and the entire family into the anti-Vietnam War protests.

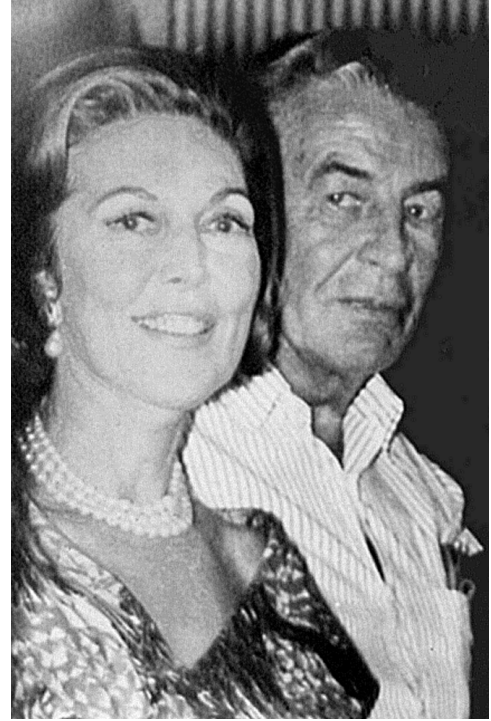


FIGURE 2-6 Vivian and Vincent Hallinan in the 1960s, amid a sixty-three-year marriage. Photo credit: James P. Walsh Collection.



Together, husband and wife worked in tandem. Vincent witnessed and counseled the California students who first protested against the House Committee on Un-American Activities at City Hall. Thus, he presided at the western genesis of the 1960s protest generation. For her part, Vivian Hallinan bore witness to the African American struggle for civil rights in the South. Her testimony took the form of her son Terence (Kayo) joining the volatile freedom rides across the southern states.

During sixth decade of their marriage, the Hallinans even enjoyed a reversal of fortune—acceptance. Vince helped by muting his atheism; “Some people need religion,” he admitted. On his deathbed, however, instead of calling for the priest as neighbors predicted, he went out singing, “The Best Things in Life Are Free.” Vivian continued their tradition by campaigning for humanitarian and left-of-center causes, including the recognition of local nuns who ministered to the homeless and to the abused.

Buried deep within Vincent Hallinan’s Freedom of Information File is a gratuitous statement concerning the couple’s buoyant and enduring marriage. Written by a nameless agent and read by Cold War security bureaucrats (including J. Edgar Hoover), it stated that the Hallinan union was “a case of one warped personality marrying another.” Well, history has a different assessment for these two children of the Irish community, not to mention history’s appraisal for the nation’s anti-communist mania and of Hoover himself.