Ethnic Heritage Center project

Museum in the Streets program planned for New Haven

The Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society is working with the four other historical societies in the Ethnic Heritage Center to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of New Haven with outdoor signs, maps and tour brochures.

The initiative will be in collaboration with The Museum in the Streets, an international organization that works with town and city historical societies. “We design free walking tours,” it says, “that foster a sense of historical identity, educate, encourage preservation of local historic sites and promote knowledge of stories, events and traditions. Our historical panels, rich with local archival imagery, are installed in cities and towns around the United States and Europe.”

The first phase of the project is to install about 30 signs relating to the ethnic history of three New Haven neighborhoods: Wooster Square, downtown and Dixwell. A large map will be erected in each neighborhood, and sites of ethnic importance will have individual signs with pictures and text describing their history. The phase will also include the publication of brochures outlining walking, bicycling and driving tours of each neighborhood’s historic sites. The goal is to complete the installation of the first phase in 2015.

Sites of importance to the history of the Irish in New Haven will include: St. Mary’s Church, Father McGivney and the Knights of Columbus headquarters, the site of the Edw. Malley Co., the Farmington Canal workers settlement known as Slineyville near Wooster Square, and the route of the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade.

The Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven and the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven got the EHC project off to a good start with a generous grant of $15,000. The five historical societies in the EHC are now conducting their own fund-raising campaigns to raise the additional funds to reach the overall goal of $55,000. Donors of $10,000-$15,000 will be acknowledged on the large map signs and in printed materials. Donors of $2,000 will be acknowledged on the signs of the individual sites.

In a recent appeal to members, President George Waldron wrote, “For over 25 years, our groups have explored and celebrated the unique history, culture and contributions of New Haven’s ethnic groups. The EHC has brought this history alive through programs and exhibits and is now expanding its outreach and offerings to the community through The Museum in the Streets program. Mayor Tony Harp will be announcing this exciting project as a press conference at New Haven City Hall on Oct. 8.”

Waldron asked members and the Irish community in the New Haven area to be generous in supporting the project. “Your generosity,” he said, “will make a difference in our community by allowing us to continue sharing our ethnic heritage.”

The Ethnic Heritage Center is a 501(c) (3) organization and donations are tax deductible. For information, call the EHC, (203) 392-6125. Checks payable to the EHC should be sent to: CTIAHS, Museum in the Streets, P.O. 185833, Hamden, CT 06518. Attn: EHC.

With the help of Sacred Heart University students, the life stories of 16 Irish immigrants who came to Connecticut in the middle of the 20th century have been recorded and archived in our CIAHS library. An Irishman was downstairs giving haircuts when the first issue of the Hartford Courant came off the press 250 years ago on Oct. 29, 1764. Later, the Courant took a very dim view of Irish folks.
Sacred Heart-CIAHS collaboration

Irish immigrants’ stories preserved for posterity

In the first semester of 2014, Professor Gerald Reid discovered a great way to give the students in his Ethnography of Ireland class at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield a first-hand view of Ireland as it was in the middle of the 20th century. Reid enlisted our Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society to help. We recruited 16 of the thousands of Irish-born men and women who have settled in Connecticut in the past 65 years and brought them to the Sacred Heart campus to tell their life stories to the students.

The nearly 30 students in Reid’s class had an opportunity to meet and conduct an oral history interview with one of the immigrants. The interviews were recorded and transcripts of all of them given to each student for analysis and discussion. The students got a first-person view of Ireland not available in books or photographs. However, the students were not the only beneficiaries of the project. In return for recruiting the people who were interviewed, our Irish historical society was rewarded with copies of each interview. The paper and disc copies are now filed in our library at the Ethnic Heritage Center in New Haven. There they will be available to scholars and students.

The significance of that may not seem so great in 2014, but it will grow with the passage of time. Fifty or seventy-five years from now, researchers who come across the transcripts will find a treasure trove. Excerpts below and on the next two pages give only a brief introduction to the rich descriptions of life in Ireland and the experiences of Irish immigrants who came to Connecticut. Thanks to Gerald Reid, thanks to the Sacred Heart students, thanks to the 16 immigrants.

Sarah Walsh Foley grew up in the Connemara region of west Galway. "My parents were farmers," she told the Sacred Heart University student interviewers. "We raised all our own things, everything, at home. Not working outside the farm … You kept the farm goods for yourself. You had to … We used to make our own butter … We baked bread … we grew the vegetables … We used to pick berries … My mom used to make jams with blueberries, … We had apple trees, and we had lots of things like that … My father always would keep a cow so that we could have fresh milk in the winter …"

Vincent McMahon was born on a farm near the town of Miltown Malbay on the west coast of County Clare. "My father died when I was very young," he said. "I grew up with my mother and my grandmother. There were just the three of us, no siblings … We lived on a very small farm, and when I look at it now, I don’t know how on earth we survived. Except that, my mother and grandmother were very hard-working, industrious people. My mother worked out in the fields as anybody else would have in those days, and managed to keep the home fires burning … We had very little money, we grew everything we ate … our own potatoes and vegetables. We killed one or two pigs a year so we had bacon … We had turkeys, geese and chickens … So everything was home-grown basically."

People gathered in the evening

Kathleen Scott O’Donovan was born in Killimor, County Galway. "It was an agricultural community. But, I was born and lived in a village, with stores and public houses," Kathleen explained. "… My father was a carpenter. My grandfather on my mother’s side was a farrier, a blacksmith. They were both tradesmen.

"People gathered in the evening. We were one of the houses in the village that they would gather in to talk and exchange the news of the day. They would stop at our house, one, because it was the first house in the village, two, because my father and grandfather were tradesmen, and they would be stopping in there to have something repaired or made. They would come with their horses … My grandfather used to shoe all the horses, and my father would make the parts, and the creels, and the wheelbarrows, and what they needed in the farming community. People would stop in automatically anyway, but then they would also stop for a cup of tea and exchange the news."

Patrick Hosey comes from Garvagh in the village of Ballinalee, County Longford, near the geographical center of Ireland. "We owned a farm," Hosey said, "and my father also worked outside the home quite a bit. He worked for a forestry service and he also was involved in small construction that he did."

On the farm, which was about 50 acres, the Hosey family grew a variety of crops such as oats, wheat and potatoes, and planted a large garden to produce lettuce, onions, radishes, carrots and cabbage for their own consumption.

"Most of the farms weren’t big enough to have all of their own equipment," said Hosey. "So what you had was called a tillage contractor within the area. He would have all the equipment and you hired him for … whatever number of days you wanted. Then the neighbors and farmers would come and work with you on that farm
while those people were there. Then they would move on to the next farm. Then you had an obligation to go on to their farm and help them do their work.

“When the weather would get real good especially with the tractors and especially sunny, warm weather, they would take great advantage of it and I can remember them going all night with lights on the equipment.”

John O’Donovan, a native of Kinsale on the coast of County Cork and husband of Kathleen O’Donovan, described how farm animals provided not only food but other goods in Ireland’s rural society. “We raised chickens and ducks for the eggs, and we sold some. We killed some of the fowl for ourselves, and ... my mother used to save the feathers and used them to put in a feather tick, which is kind of a mattress that’s used in the beds ... When they had enough feathers, they’d close up the bag and use it in the bed. If we didn’t have enough feathers, we’d use the chaff from the threshing to fill out the feathers, or to fill out the ticks, and we would sleep on those, sleep on the ticks with the chaff from the threshings.

“We had no electricity, plumbing ... We saved the rainwater in barrels for washing and cooking, and we had to get the drinking water about half a mile away in the nearest well that we had. We wore the same clothes all week, special dress on Sunday for Mass, usually changed after church.”

John Droney, a native of Bell Harbour, a hamlet of just seven houses in the northwest of County Clare, studied under similar conditions. Said Droney, “We had the oil lamps, and we did our homework close as we could come to an oil lamp hanging off the ceiling, and that was the only source of light we had to do our homework, and we had lots of it, believe me.”

“We lived on a farm and we did the usual farming of wheat and barley and one thing we grew quite a bit of was sugar beet. That was processed in factories over there into sugar. That was mostly during the Second World War when sugar imports were almost impossible to get ...”

Bridget Miriam Lillis, a native of County Wicklow on the east coast of Ireland, grew up in the town of Arklow, a commercial community. She was one of five children. “My father had a butcher shop,” she said, “and my mother had a bed and breakfast, kind of a guest house. It was mostly a seasonal guest house so in the winter we would have our choice of a room, in the summer, we would kind of all be put into an attic area ...”

Lillis’s mother was herself an immigrant. She was born in Ireland, but went to Australia to live with aunts when her mother died. She returned to Ireland in 1935 and was married there in 1937.

Finbarr Moynihan was a native of Cork city, but as a boy he had a taste of farming outside the city. In the summer, he and his friends, “went out to tend the turnips, and stuff like that in the fields. It was something different for us because we were city folk ... We did that a number of years ... A fellow picked us up in his old car and we used to fight ... trying to fit into the car ... He paid us two shillings and sixpence for the full week.”

“My father was a chemist,” Moynihan said. “He had his own what they call a chemist shop, a drugstore here. He died in 1951. I was 13 and there was nobody in the family to keep the business ...”

Another city boy was Sean O’Connor. “City born and bred,” O’Connor said. “On my father’s side, we go back six generations in Dublin. My mother’s mother married an Englishman who was ... a painter and had just finished his apprenticeship ... got into a fight in a bar in Liverpool. The story is that someone died as a result of the fight, and my grandfather skipped over to Ireland and started to get jobs ... He was very, very skilled.

“We lived in a typical lower middle-class, working class ... row house ... Two parents, and four children. I was the eldest ... At that time, fish was the poor people’s ...”
immigrants stories
(Continued from page 3)
food. Very different from what it is now. For the equivalent of a quarter, my mother could buy four whitening, which would feed the six of us.”

Another Dubliner is Patrick Whelan. Dublin, he said, “was very parochial in many respects ... It was divided up. There were working-class areas and there were very middle-class areas and there were very wealthy areas. I'm from the north side of Dublin, which is not the most wealthy side ... or the fanciest side ... But there's a lot of history wrapped up in the north side, so north side people are very conscious of the fact.

“My memories of childhood were of being brought around the city by my mother and learning everything I need to know in her opinion, at least, about the history of the place and where things happened ...”

immigration a way of life
Whether they grew up in an urban or a rural setting, for Irish people in the mid-20th century immigration was a way of life.

Thomas Faherty, a native of the Connemara region in the west of Galway, told the student interviewers, “In the 1950s in Ireland, there weren't great times. The immigration was very high. We grew up watching the older kids in the family, getting out of school at 14 and immigrating, and we were very familiar with that. And as we got to be 18 and 19, we were leaving ... Most of it was sad I suppose because the friends ... We watched them leave. And back then, the chances of ever seeing them again were slim ... There's people I've never seen since ... They went to Australia, they went to the United States, they went to England, they went to different parts of the world.”

“I started working when I was 14, when I got out of school. I started working for a neighbor ... to cut the peat out of the turf ... I worked at that for about two years and it was hard work, cutting it by hand. After that, I went to work for the forestry department planting trees ... I got laid off there and then I went to work for the Galway County Council ... repairing the roads and ... I got laid off ... My sister was living here at that time, so I wrote to her and said 'Could I come to America?' And she sent me the money and that June 1959, I sailed to New York from Cobh in Ireland, on the boat.”

Edward (Ned) Foley, is a native of the town of Dingle in County Kerry, and the husband of Sarah Walsh Foley. In Dingle, Ned said, “There were two classes; there were the haves and there were the have-nots. There were poor, poor people there and there were people who got things handed down to them. They kept it very tight and close ...”

“It was a place you grew up and (when) you were 15, 18, 20, you were gone, you were gone ... Everybody was gone. There were some that stayed back, like the oldest person in the family would stay back if there were a little farm. They'd get the farm from their parents.”

“I left Ireland because my brother and sister were here in the States. They were here a year before me, a year and a half. There was nothing in Ireland, only hard work ... When Mom died, there were three of us in the states, five back in Ireland. We brought them out here, myself and my sister and my brother...”

When asked by student interviewers why he left Ireland, Michael McGrath, a native of Carna in County Galway, replied, “My sister and I talk about this. I've asked her, 'Why did we immigrate?' 'Why do we all immigrate?' Her answer is always, 'We're expected to.'

"I was raised on a small farm, which is still in the family. My sister now owns it. My other sister is married about ten miles down the road, and I have a third sister who has lived in England since the 1960s. McGrath spent a year in England, "I came back from England in the spring with plans to help my mother with spring work and planting ... I met the young lady who was to become my wife. So I didn't go back to England. The young lady ended up coming to the States in 1967, and I came four years later. It took me four years to figure out, 'Maybe she's not coming back.' And here I am 43 years later."

Michael McHugh was born in Ballina-more, Count Leitrim. His family had a farm “with cattle and mixed farming.”

McHugh left home at the age of 16, but his immigration was in steps. He went first to Dublin to become an apprentice bar-tender in a pub owned by a Ballinmore couple. After two years there, he went to England and worked as a conductor collecting fares on a double-decker bus in Birmingham for two years. Then, with the help of an uncle, he came to the United States. The uncle sponsored him, did all the paperwork and paid the airfare.

Greeted by Irish names and kin
“One thing that struck me, when I arrived in Kennedy,” recalled McHugh. “When I had to go through the customs, I saw a lot of name tags with Irish names on, like Murphy and O'Brien ... It made me feel good ... After a while you realize how well the Irish did in this country.”

McHugh also had a warm reception in New York. “I felt like I was coming home,” he said, “because I had so many relatives here ... My father had about five brothers here at one time, and then on my mother's side, she had about six or seven sisters, and they all lived around New York, and she had a brother also ... It was fabulous. I had a lot more relatives in this country than I ever had in Ireland.”

Another Leitrim native was Sean Canning who with a brother and two sisters grew up “just outside of the town of Drumshanbo” in a house with only two bedrooms, a kitchen, and that was about it ...”

Canning's father was no stranger to the United States. “He came to this country in 1928, and he went back to Ireland in the Depression, around 1932,” said Sean.

A generation later, Sean found himself also thinking of immigration. “I was in Ireland, out of school, 14. Little jobs, there and here. I went to work in a garage ... I wasn't really repairing cars. I was just moving them around, and helping with the work ... and that wasn't paying very much money... So I talked to my father about it. He had a brother in New Haven, John Canning was his name. And I had my father write to my uncle, and ask him if it was possible for me to come to him ... and he would sponsor me."

Thus it was that Canning having ”waited for Christmas to be spent in Ireland” sailed from Cork and arrived in New York in January 1956 — “looking forward to a new life, hoping that I was going to make it OK.”
An Irish link to the Hartford Courant’s 250th birthday ...

Happy 250th birthday to one of Connecticut’s most honored institutions: the Hartford Courant. This month, the Courant is celebrating the anniversary of its first issue on Oct. 29, 1764.

Beginning in January of this year, the Courant has been publishing special articles about its 250-year run. The first sentence in the first article in the series mentions an Irish connection at the first ever issue of the Courant. The author of the article, Jim Shea, wrote: “If you were in the vicinity of Mooklar’s barbershop, across from the Flagg Tavern on the 29th of October 1764, you probably picked up a copy of Hartford’s new newspaper, the Connecticut Courant.”

The author of the biography of the Courant, titled Older Than The Nation and published in 1964, when the paper celebrated its 200th anniversary, also mentioned the Irish link on the first page of that book.

“It was a late October day in 1764,” wrote John Bard McNulty, “when draymen unloaded the heavy timbers of Thomas Green’s printing press and carried them up to the rooms above Mooklar’s barber shop. As Green helped the men unload, he could see the gambrel-roofed State House – Court House, it was called in those days – across the street. Almost opposite stood the venerable Flagg Tavern, favorite resort of politicians during sessions of the General Court. Small shops and comfortable clapboard homes stood along the rutted main street under arching elms and maples.”

In his Connecticut Historical Collections, John Warner Barber published a drawing of the buildings on Main Street in Hartford at the time of the American Revolution. The arrow points to the barbershop of Irishman James Mooklar. On the second floor of the same building, the first issue of the Hartford Courant was printed on Oct. 29, 1764.

The Irish link is that the barber James Mooklar, who occupied the ground floor in the building where the first issues of the Courant were printed, was an Irishman. The fact that Mooklar was there at the birth of the Courant is an interesting historical tidbit. It also is one more piece of evidence that the widely accepted stereotype – “Irish people started arriving in Connecticut in the 1850s” – is nonsense.

Mooklar was one of a number of Irish people who came to Hartford beginning as early as the 1650s, and who continued to arrive in small, but steady numbers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries long before the 1850s tidal wave caused by the Great Hunger.

Mooklar was born about 1720 somewhere in Ireland. His surname is often written Moclair, Mookler. While the name has an entirely different ring than more common O’s and Mac’s of so many Irish names, Mooklar is ancient in Ireland. It is “on record in Tipperary since 1210,” according to Irish genealogist Edward MacLysaght. It derives from the French “Mauclerc,” a ruling family.

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No question that during most of its 250-year run the Hartford Courant has been a sensible, fair-minded voice of reason in public dialogue. But when it came to Irish immigrants in mid-19th century, the Courant, not only by an occasional slip of pen, but by a barrage of heavy artillery maligned anything and everything Irish.

Whether it be the near treason of a St. Patrick’s Day ritual, the theft of jobs from hard-working Americans, the threat of Irish priests to religious freedom, the cost of welfare, or even a horse being killed by a train, Connecticut’s flagship newspaper was ready to come down hard on that huge threat to the American way of life: the Irish.

On March 20, 1855, the Courant pointed out the menace of St. Patrick’s Day: “What have American citizens to do with the celebration of Ireland’s patron saint? When foreigners come to our shores and are admitted to the ranks of our citizens, it is to forget that they were Irish or English or Germans. They profess to denationalize themselves when they assume the privileges of American citizens. Why then do they keep up those public celebrations that preserve the memory of their former allegiance? It has been the great evil of late years with our foreign population that they take no pains to Americanize themselves, but...
Irish barber shared office space with the Courant

(Continued from page 5)

in the Middle Ages in the province of Brittany on France’s Atlantic coast.

In colonial times, Mooklars, some said to be of Scottish descent, turn up in Virginia and New York as well as Connecticut. In his Connecticut Historical Collections published in 1836, John Warner Barber included a drawing showing the location of buildings along Main Street during the period of the American Revolution. The location of Mooklar’s establishment is about halfway up on the left side of the street. Leaving no doubt as to Mooklar’s origins, Barber inserted a footnote which states: “Mooklar was an Irishman; the first printing office in Hartford was in a chamber over his shop.”

In his history of colonial Hartford, William Deloss Love wrote that Mooklar was a “noted and well accomplished artist,” apparently meaning either that he had a talent for art or that he was artistic in his tonsorial work. Love said Mooklar came to Hartford before 1758 and that he married Sabra Center of Hartford that same year.

Mooklar was a fixture in Hartford in that era. In 1768 he warned his customers to “make immediate settlement or expect Trouble,” with the added comment that he was going on a voyage to Europe. A year later, Mooklar advertised his barbershop as being “within a stone’s throw of the North Meeting House,” which does indeed appear just two doors down the street on Barber’s sketch.

In 1771, Hartford approved construction of a schoolhouse near the northeastern corner of the ancient burying grounds. The schoolhouse is next door to Mooklar’s establishment. Apparently in some connection with the sitting of the school, historian Love wrote that Mooklar “was granted liberty to erect an addition to his shop on the burying ground … He was granted six feet and took about twice that.”

Records from the Revolutionary War indicate that in 1778 Mooklar was among 37 Hartford men appointed to guard “the Treasurers and Loan Offices, Office of the Secretary and Pay Table Apportioned by the General Assembly of the Governor and Company of the State of Connecticut Holden at Hartford … from June 1 to Nov. 5 inclusive.” Mooklar would have been 58 years old at that time.

Although a barber by trade while in Hartford, James Mooklar also had a hand in the newspapering business. Either before he came to Hartford or after, he was a post rider carrying on horseback copies of the New York Thursday’s Gazette from New York City to Hartford. He was hired for that job sometime around 1760 by John Holt, a partner in the Thursday’s Gazette. Interestingly, Holt and James Parker had established Connecticut’s first newspaper, the Connecticut Gazette, in New Haven in 1755. The Connecticut Gazette was nine years older than the Courant in Hartford, but proved to have none of the staying power of the Courant.

Mooklar and Holt had a falling out over money. On June 15, 1763, Holt published an advertisement warning patrons not to deal with Mooklar. The advertisement read: “Whereas Mr. James Mookler, who formerly was employed as one of the Carriers of the New York Thursday’s Gazette, from New York to Hartford, has been for some months discharged from that Business, as advertised in this Paper about that Time; when I desired that no Person who was indebted to me for the said Paper, or on any other Account, might pay any Money to the said Mookler; and whereas he has not yet settled his Account with me, nor rendered me an Account of the Names of the Persons to whom he delivered my News Papers, nor the sums of Money received of them, or on other Accounts as a News Rider, or Letter Carrier: These are therefore again to desire that no Person who has had the said Papers of him, or is otherwise indebted to me, will pay any Money to him on my Account; and further to desire that all Persons who had my Papers by his Hand, will let me know their Names, when they began, the Manner of his performing the Service and the Sums they have paid him as News Rider …”

Whatever the grounds for Holt’s complaints, they apparently were not serious enough to bring charges against Mooklar. And in his years in Hartford, Mooklar seems to have been a law-abiding and accepted member of the community, although with a sharp edge from time to time.

It is also interesting to speculate, given Mooklar’s experience in newspaper delivery, whether he might have been involved in that phase of operations with the Connecticut Courant in its earliest years.

Historian Love wrote that the property on which Mooklar had his barbershop “passed in 1786 to Prosper Hosmer.” Hosmer, a descendant of one of the first settlers of Hartford, married Catherine Mooklar, probably a daughter of James Mooklar. That likelihood is strengthened by the fact that James Mooklar died in Hudson, N.Y., in August 1790 at the age of 70, and that Prosper Hosmer and his wife moved to Hudson in 1788. Prosper died there in 1850 at the age of 93 and was survived by his widow, age 90.

Other Mooklars turn up in Hudson, which is a port on the Hudson River. In the early 1800s, James Mooklar, apparently the son of the barber, is mentioned as owner of a brig Mark & Mary. A John Mooklar was master of the same ship engaged in the sugar and rum trade in the Caribbean. In 1803, the Mark & Mary was a victim of the English Navy’s penchant for raiding American ships on the high seas and impressing their sailors. The Hudson Bee of Sept. 6 that year reported that the “British frigate Emerald … pressed three men and a boy” from the Mark & Mary at sea in the Caribbean.

In 1806, the younger James Mooklar and his mother Sabra were both reported insolvent with Prosper Hosmer “one of the petitioning creditors.” John Mooklar died in 1807 at the age of 40 and James died in 1808, aged 46.

(Continued from page 5) regard the country and its habits in the light of a conquest.

However, if those same Irish took an interest in getting involved in public affairs, then, warned the Courant of April 18, 1856, “Irishmen will soon be found in all our minor offices and like the Irish police in New York allow their countrymen the fullest liberty and never check them from their crime ... Connecticut will no longer be called the Land of Steady Habits. The coarsest and most brutalizing passions will reign supreme and drunkenness and riot fill the streets.”

The Courant knew full well the dangers of allowing Irish immigrants to vote. “Can any American — any lover of his country — behold the hundreds of ignorant, degraded and priest-led foreigners that have been made voters in this State the few days past, without shuddering at the future condition of the country? ... This throng of bigoted Irish with no knowledge of the working of republican institutions ... led by priests only one degree advanced beyond them in civilization — these are the men to control the destinies of the state ...”

On election day, Oct. 13, 1857, the Courant shuddered to think what might happen. There were issues of considerable importance at stake and the newspaper worried that many voters would pay little attention. It warned them not to stay home and let the Irish control the outcome. And it did so without even using the word “Irish”: “There is, however, one class of voters who never forget election day, especially when they can get a dollar or a drink by a vote.”

The Irish not only sold their votes for a dollar or a drink, but used physical force to keep others from voting. The Courant on Aug. 17, 1855, asked, “How often have rum-infuriated Irishmen blocked up the narrow steps to our voting place in the City Hall, and prevented the feeble and the timid from passing up?”

The Courant saw Irish conspiracies everywhere. On Dec. 8, 1858, it reported, “It was proposed to the town meeting of Monday, and the proposition was backed by several hundred Irish voters who had been secretly drummed up for the occasion, to pay from the City Treasury $300 for the support ... of the Roman Catholic School in charge of the Sisters of Mercy ... In plain words that $300 of the public funds would be placed in the hands of entirely irresponsible parties for the purposes of a sectarian creed!”

The article went on to note that “two-thirds of the children supported by (the Hartford Orphan Asylum) are of Roman Catholic parentage. The same thing may be said of the jails and almshouses all over the country ... Ninety percent of the police cases are the result of failings of the Roman Catholic Irish.

“... these Romanists, encouraged by their priests, will do all they can to break down the laws and the customs of New England.”

Hartford Courant
Aug. 22, 1859

“Why do they not move for a new police system, by which these unfortunate shall be tried and pardoned or condemned by the Sisters of Mercy? We pay now more for the support of unfortunate Irish Roman Catholics than for the support of our native citizens as a glance at the names in our criminal reports will show.”

Given all the problems the Irish were causing, it might be thought the Courant would be pleased as punch if those Irish would just get jobs and become productive members of society. But energetic Irishmen were as menacing as lazy ones: “The wages of skilled laborers are inevitably depreciated by the green-horns who always profess to be able to do anything and work for paltry prices,” grumbled the newspaper on April 6, 1856. “The American mechanic will never be able to clothe, feed and educate his family, as he ought to, while this horde of Irish are besieging the work shops for work at less than living prices.”

Another habit that rubbed the Courant the wrong way was the fondness of Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans for the camaraderie and the opportunity for community service available to them as militia-men. The ever vigilant Courant stood foursquare against that as did Connecticut Gov. William Minor. It was obvious to them that Irishmen could not be trusted to remain loyal in any crisis demanding military intervention.

When Minor ordered six mostly Irish militia companies disbanded for that reason in 1855, the Courant breathed a huge sigh of relief. It editorialized on Sept. 26, 1855: “We presume that our citizens will soon be relieved from the disgrace of seeing bands of foreigners in our streets armed and organized as such, paid from the Treasury of the state and prepared at any moment to interfere decisively in behalf of their countrymen.”

The Courant served its readers a steady and comprehensive menu of malevolent, corrupt just plain incompetent Irish folks. On Aug. 29, 1855, it foamed at the mouth over “a great stupid lout of an Irishman.” The lout was John Cluney; his sin, that he let his horse graze beside the railroad track at Flower Street. Along came the morning train from Waterbury and struck the horse and “pitched him 40 feet heels over head into a ditch.”

The horse had to be shot and the Courant gave Cluney a verbal flogging: “Such an owner deserves no sympathy ... and we trust he may never own another horse; he is not fit to be the owner of that noble animal.”

The Courant conceded that a number of people had complained about the Waterbury train usually speeding excessively while coming into the city, but nonetheless, “the owner of the horse is the person really to blame,” it contended.

The Courant was similarly outraged when the Irish parishioners of St. Mary’s Church in Norwich attended a picnic and outing in Middletown on a Sunday in summer 1859. They did it maliciously, announced the Courant of Aug. 22, 1859, “because these Romanists, encouraged by their priests, will do all they can to break down the laws and the customs of New England.”

Just in case readers did not realize how serious the threat was, the Courant reminded them: “We all know too well what an Irish excursion on the Sabbath will be —

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The Courant and the Irish

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what an annoyance to the sober part of the community and what a destruction to all the peace, quietness and sobriety of those who wish to worship God publicly on that day.”

What was worse, fumed the Courant was that Father Kelly had “ordered his congregation not to attend any other excursion until then, threatening to refuse absolution to the disobedient.”

Kelly denied that he threatened his parishioners. But the Courant would have none of it. “Why not on a weekday?” it asked, apparently not considering that the Irish perhaps might have had to work six days a week, 10 or 12 hours a day, which was also a New England custom in that era.

Even Irish women were seen as threats by the Courant. At the top of its editorial page on Sept. 2, 1857, the paper published a lengthy opinion piece about a theory that the Anglo-Saxon race was deteriorating. It suggested both New England Yankee women and, of course, Irish women were at fault.

In previous centuries, it said, the daughters of the Puritan forefathers, “bore 10, 12 and sometimes 15 children and lived to be strong and hearty old women. At present, giving birth to three or four children is all the existing race of women can do …” Easy for the Courant’s male editors to say!

Those editors warned of impending disaster caused by the daughters of Celts: “Irish women are now taking the place of our grandmothers in their physical powers … The Irish women themselves boast of their superior fecundity and greater physical powers and are already looking forward to the time when their race shall be the governing one on our New England hills.”

The editors’ answer for Yankees was, “Let young married women, the first year of keeping house, do without a domestic, and do their own small household work … But now-a-days a man marries a wife and installs her into a new and well-filled house, and then goes for some Catherine McShane or Bridget McFarland … to do for him what his beloved ought to do.”

In the world view of the Courant — expressed not only in its editorials but in its news articles — there was nothing whatsoever beneficial in having Irish folks settle in Connecticut. Most other Connecticut newspapers during that era had misgivings about Irish immigrants, but few papers dumped on the Irish as constantly and as viciously as did the Courant.

All of which makes one wonder why on March 17, 1863, the St. Patrick’s Day parade in Hartford went out of its way to stop “in front of the Courant office for a few moments, and three cheers was given for that paper.”

Loutish, bigoted, stupid, treacherous, dangerous, plotting Irish, indeed. Go figure!