A rich vein of grassroots historical information about Connecticut’s Irish people in the 1870s can be found in the archives of a weekly newspaper — The Irish-American — that was published in New York City from 1849 until 1915.

The Irish-American was popular and influential and had a widespread readership among Irish immigrant families. It is described in a history of New York City’s Irish as “one of the most important sources of information on the Irish in New York in the (19th) century and one that has been largely overlooked by those who have written on this subject ...”

Each Saturday, the three proprietors of The Irish-American published eight pages of assorted news and opinion focused on happenings in Ireland and in enclaves of Irish immigrants. The articles ranged from obituaries and weddings to religious and political events and issues. It printed items from all over Ireland and the United States.

The Irish-American’s special value for Connecticut is that during the early 1870s one of its correspondents, James Rogers, wrote dozens of fairly lengthy articles about the Irish in New York’s neighbor, the Nutmeg State.

For whatever reason, Rogers or someone who made decisions about The Irish-American’s content, took a special interest in Connecticut and its Irish inhabitants. For about a year and a half beginning in late 1872, Rogers wandered around the Land of Steady Habits regularly dispatching for publication articles about the Irish people he met, their jobs, their parishes, their schools, their religious and political involvement and events.

The newspaper printed his writings — under the special title “Jottings By The Way” — even though it did not publish similar regular series of articles about New Jersey or Long Island or any of the five boroughs where its circulation was greatest.

“Jottings By The Way” was a common headline in American newspapers in that era. It always denoted the kind of articles that today show up in travel sections and pages — spur of the moment...

Please turn to page 2

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observations “jotted down” by travelers on their journeys. It was an apt title for the type of word sketches Rogers drew about the Irish he found in Connecticut’s towns and cities. His articles were a mixture of the interesting topics a writer might mention about a distant place with particular notice about how many Irish people were living there and how they were getting along.

The first installment of Connecticut jottings appeared in Vol. XXIV, No. 47, dated Nov. 23, 1872. Perhaps indicating that the publishers were not entirely sold on the idea of a special series about Connecticut’s Irish, the Rogers piece was relegated to the very last column on the very last page of that issue.

As he did in each succeeding article, Rogers began with the salutation: “To the Editors of the Irish-American.” In this case, he noted that he was writing at “Merchants Hotel, State St., New Haven, Conn., Nov. 15, 1872.” He began: “Gentlemen,—Hoping it may interest the readers of the Irish-American, I send you some account of my visit to ‘the City of Elms’ … I have been agreeably surprised at the number and elegance of the public buildings, and the neatness, cleanliness and splendor of the streets of this city.”

Among the impressive buildings, Rogers said, were those of Yale College. At that point, he began his observations of Connecticut’s Irish background by noting, “An Irishman, Bishop Berkeley, gave such large endowments, both in money and property, to this institution that he may be said to be its founder.”

Bishop George Berkeley was an Anglo-Irishman born in 1685 at Dysart Castle near Thomaston, County Kilkenny. He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, was ordained in the Church of Ireland and beginning in 1728 spent three years in Rhode Island. While there he became friends with the Rev. Samuel Johnson, a Yale graduate and Episcopal pastor in Stratford, Connecticut.

After returning to Ireland, Berkeley was appointed bishop of the Church of Ireland’s Diocese of Cloyne in County Cork. At Johnson’s urging, he established a scholarship program at Yale and donated more than 900 books to the college library. “It was one of Yale’s largest and most important donations,” according to Wikipedia. “It doubled its library holdings, improved the college’s financial position, and brought Anglican religious ideas and English culture into New England…”

Typical of the mix of topics in “Jottings By The Way,” Rogers after telling of the Irish link at early Yale, then turned to the more mundane topic of the size of the Irish community in New Haven in the 1870s.

He stated that New Haven’s population was 51,000, that 20,000 were Catholics and that 18,000 of those were Irish. He seems to have come within a ballpark figure. The 1870 census returns showed about 9,700 Irish natives in the city. If to those are added an estimate of a generation or two of offspring from typically large Irish-American families, then the total must have come not too far short of 18,000 of Irish descent all told.

Rogers said there were five Catholic parishes in the city. “The Rev. Father Hart, pastor of St. Patrick’s, has quite recently erected, adjoining his beautiful church, a large and very handsome building to be devoted to lectures, social gatherings, etc. … The Rev. Father Murphy, pastor of St. Mary’s is erecting in the immediate vicinity of Yale College … a large church of gorgeous architecture and at a cost of $200,000 dollars!”

The jottings frequently include brief sketches of people in the Irish community. In the first jottings, Rogers singled out Major Patrick Maher and Charles Fagan.

Maher, a veteran of service as an officer in the 24th Connecticut Infantry during the Civil War, was described by Rogers as “a Tipperary man and an Irish patriot in the truest and best sense of the word.” A member of the New Haven Board of Education, Maher gave Rogers a tour of the city’s recently completed high school. Rogers marveled that the school was offering day and evening classes, “the latter devoted to grown persons of both sexes, who may feel desirous to improve their education, all of whom are taught gratuitously.”

Fagan, was an old-timer. “I came here 55 years ago,” he told Rogers, “and no resident Irishman had ever preceded me. A year after, when a few Irish men and women had settled here, we got a priest in New York, the Rev. Father Power, to come here and say a Mass, there being no priest anywhere between New York and Boston; and as no Irishman had yet resided in his own house here, it was only after many efforts and with great difficulty, we at last induced a Puritan to let us have, for a consideration, the use of his barroom for the celebration of Divine service, and this was the first Mass ever said in New Haven.

“From this time, we managed to have a Mass once in about every four months. In another year, a church was built in Hartford city, 36 miles from here. This was to us a great triumph. We usually left on Saturdays or Saturday nights, arriving in Hartford in time for Mass on Sundays, returning here on Mondays. Two years later we purchased an old Protestant church which we soon rebuilt …”

Rogers continued his explorations of New Haven’s Irish community in his second essay which appeared in The Irish-American on Dec. 7, 1872.

He described the opening night of what apparently was a weekend event, a fund-raising fair at the new St. Mary’s parish near the Yale campus. Guest of honor at the opening was the Rev. Father Edward J. O’Brien of Middletown, who had been the first pastor of St. Mary’s. “The large hall was literally crammed,” wrote Rogers. “Father O’Brien’s arrival in the city was hailed by the attendance of a splendid brass band and the shouts of welcome of the people … repeated cheers were given for Father O’Brien and for Father Murphy, the band playing ‘Auld Lang Syne.’”

The fiscal importance of such events to a parish was noted by Rogers who said he had been told that a parish in Meriden had raised $8,000 at a recent fair.

In an indication of the type of observa-

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During his almost two years of writing columns about Connecticut’s Irish, James Rogers boarded in hotels like New Haven’s Merchants Hotel, as did the traveling salesmen of the late 19th century.
tions that would appear in future articles, Rogers said that he spent a day visiting the school system that Father Hart had organized at St. Patrick's parish in the Wooster Square neighborhood of New Haven.

The system, he said, actually comprised "thirteen schools ... constituting a handsome group of buildings attached to his splendid church and taught by twelve of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Patrick's Convent, assisted by two lay teachers. Sister Agnes, the superintendent, was pleased to conduct me through all her schools.

"... In all these schools, both sexes are taught; the girls occupying one side in each school, the boys the other."

The average age of the first school was five and a half years, that of the thirteenth school was 14 years. "Each sister has entire charge of a school," Rogers wrote, "... which she teaches without monitor or monitress, paid or unpaid, or assistant of any kind, except that Sister Agnes superintends all the schools. There are two classes or grades of proficiency in each school ... In each school there is exhibited its 'Time Table' which contains an admirable course of instruction, providing constant and useful employment of teachers and pupils during the specified school hours ... the teacher always teaching one or other of her two classes, while the other is, under her supervision, engaged at lesson — exercises on slate or paper ... Besides spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic, music by note, and deportment are taught also in all the schools, and free-hand drawing in many."

Rogers also noted, "There are 659 pupils in constant attendance and more than 50 applicants have recently been refused admittance for want of accommodation."

In 1868, an arrangement had been worked out that made it possible for St. Patrick's school to be given state aid and operated as a public school — officially the Hamilton Street School — with the faculty comprised mainly of Sisters of Mercy. Rogers explained that textbooks were non-sectarian and approved by the city Board of Education and that no religious instruction was permitted. The sisters, he wrote, "devoted their four vacations, two weeks at Christmas, two weeks at Easter, two months in summer and one week at Thanksgiving in giving religious instruction."

In the third of his columns in 1872, Rogers inserted a tidbit about an Irish New Haven resident who had an interesting and important job in the years after the Civil War. His name was Owen O'Brien and he was born in Ireland in the 1820s. He immigrated to Maryland and was active in the Irish community in Baltimore where he worked for a number of years in the post office. In 1850, O'Brien went into business with P.J. Hedian as partners in publishing the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.

During the Civil War, O'Brien was business manager of another newspaper, the Baltimore Bulletin. In August 1864, the Bulletin was suppressed by Union Gen. Lou Wallace after it reprinted several articles from the New York Freeman's Journal. The articles were deemed to be "denunciatory of the President and his Cabinet." O'Brien was required to answer satisfactorily seven questions regarding his loyalty.

By 1870, O'Brien and his wife Mary were living in New Haven and his occupation was listed on the census returns as "clerk in adjutant-general's office."

By that time, New Haven and Hartford were still co-capital cities of Connecticut. New Haven had a State House on the Green. The state legislature took turns meeting there and in Hartford. The state also maintained an adjutant-general's office in New Haven.

Rogers accepted an invitation for a guided tour of the New Haven State House and he was fascinated to find that O'Brien was in charge there of maintaining the records of Connecticut soldiers in the Civil War. "I felt much interested," he wrote, "in visiting the adjutant-general's office ... and in seeing how admirably well are kept the records of the 31 regiments of the state which served in the war. The record of any man, in any company and regiment can be reached without a moment's delay or difficulty."

Especially gratifying, said Rogers, was the fact that in the adjutant-general's office, "All claims of soldiers' widows and soldiers' orphans are collected free of charge to the applicants, thus preserving them from the imposition and frauds of 'agents.'"

"I have been told by military officers here," wrote Rogers, "that during the five years Mr. O'Brien has had charge of this department, he has earned for himself the admiration and confidence of the officials, officers and people of the state."

**Middletown**

During 1873, Rogers roamed around Connecticut jotting down and passing along to the New York newspaper similarly varied stories and anecdotes with the focus always on Irish people and events. On Feb. 6 that year, The Irish-American published his observations of Middletown, which he described as "a beautiful city situated on the bank of the Connecticut River ... 24 miles distant from Long Island Sound."

Middletown's population, he wrote, was 12,000 of whom more than 4,000 were Catholics and almost exclusively Irish: "Many Irishmen to whom I have been introduced in this city possess in an eminent degree the strongest attachment to their faith and the greatest love for the old land."

The first Catholic organization in Middletown, according to Rogers, was the 200-member St. John's Benevolent Society which was founded in 1853 by Thomas Ross. An early supporter of the society, wrote Rogers, was Michael H. Griffin who...
made an annual donation of $200 until his death in July 1870. Born in Ireland in 1818, Griffin was a railroad contractor and one of the first Irishmen elected a state representative in Connecticut.

Thanks to another Irish immigrant, John Pitt Stack, Middletown had a band which, Rogers wrote, consisted "of 20 musicians, all Irishmen, in splendid uniforms, elaborately trimmed with gold ...." Born in Limerick in 1827, Stack became a musician in the British army at an early age. He was bandmaster of the Third U.S. Artillery in the Civil War and was a music teacher in Middletown and organist at St. John's Church, one of the earliest Catholic parishes in the state. Rogers said the Middletown band was in great demand to march and play in St. Patrick's Day parades in Connecticut.

Rogers wrote that another Middletown Irishman, Thomas Walsh, introduced him to a relic of an earlier Irish presence in that city: the home of Commodore Thomas Macdonough. The descendant of Dublin ancestors who immigrated to Delaware in colonial times, Macdonough was a career U.S. Navy officer in the early 19th century. While stationed in Middletown, he married Lucy Ann Shaler, the daughter of a prominent Yankee family. During the War of 1812, Macdonough was the hero of the American naval victory at Plattsburg on Lake Champlain. Before and after the war, he, Lucy and their children lived in Middletown.

Rogers made it a habit wherever he went to visit factories and other places of business where Irish men and women were employed. His visits were welcomed and he frequently was given guided tours by company managers and by Irish employees.

In Middletown, he visited the Russell Manufacturing Company complex, the first factory of which was built in 1836 and is today on the National Register of Historic Places. The company manufactured a variety of textile products and was the nation's largest producer of suspenders.

The complex, wrote Rogers, "consists of three large and imposing buildings at South Farms in the city and three others in the vicinity. It has 600 operatives in constant employment, of whom more than 500 are Irish. More than three-fourths are girls, who earn at an average from $8 to $15 a week."

"When (company President) E.G. Hubbard became associated with the firm there were but few hands employed and the number of looms was only twelve. There are at present 260 looms and an immense quantity of other machinery, all of the most expensive and complicated sort ... In the spinning department there are 1,728 spinning spindles, 612 twisting spindles and 18 carding machines ... The whole is worked partly by steam and partly by water power, the water supplied from three reservoirs ..."

"Among the articles manufactured only in this factory are — patent cotton belting, cotton back-bandinng, cotton hose goods for steam fire engines ... 36,000 pair of suspenders are made weekly here and 720,000 yards of webbing are also woven here each week...

"Machine shops are attached in which the company makes all their looms, do all their repairing, etc. They send patterns to the iron foundry of Styles & Co., in this city where there are 75 operatives."

The few employees who were not Irish, according to Rogers, were American natives, French, English, Scots and Germans.

The Russell Company also erected and rented to employees a large boardinghouse and 24 tenement houses each occupied by at least four tenants.

Many department foremen were Irish, Rogers said, adding, "There is not one county in Ireland to which some of the 400 Irish girls ... do not belong, and (represent) nearly as great a number of familiar names as are to be met in any town or district in Ireland."

Irish employees told Rogers that the company president "has always been prominent and liberal in contributing to their church and schools." Rogers added that when he interviewed Hubbard, the president "spoke of the Irish girls in his employment, with reference to their honesty and virtue, in terms which reflect the highest credit on them. They are industrious and intelligent, never giving cause for reprimand or violating the rules ..."
Hubbard said that “acting on the suggestion and recommendation of some of the Irish men and girls … (I) paid the passages of many Irish families to this country … (and) they, without exception, have paid me back in work; so that there is not as much as one cent of the money I so advanced now due to me. The Irish are very good. We like to have them; and, when treated kindly, they act with honor and gratitude in return. The girls can all save plenty of money and so can all the men, too, except such of them as are too fond of drink. Here, however, we enforce the rule of strict sobriety, and the rule is observed.”

Rogers also visited the Middletown Shirt Factory and found there similarly large numbers of Irish immigrants. Located in a “handsome brick building consisting of five rooms each 50 feet long and 40 feet broad, the factory employed 125 Irish girls. The working hours were “from half past seven to six o'clock with an hour allowed for dinner.” The girls’ weekly wages ranged from $7 to $10, the number of shirts produced in a week varying from 4,000 to 6,000.

Portland

During his visit to Middletown, Rogers was escorted on a side-tour to a Catholic school in Portland, a town which is just across the Connecticut River. Father Duffy was the pastor of the church there and the school was overseen by a Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who also taught the senior grades. She was assisted by three “young ladies,” one of whom was a Miss Markley who taught the middle grades.

The school had 300 students, all Irish except a few Americans, English, Norwegians and Canadians.

Reading and arithmetic were priority subjects. As in New Haven, those students not being taught at a given time were at desks in one section of the building doing lessons either on slate or on paper.

In addition to some factories, Portland also had brownstone quarries that operated as early as the 1690s and attracted some of the earliest employment-seeking Irish immigrants.

In fact, so many Irish natives had settled there that Rogers was surprised to find, “In Portland, not only is the Irish language very much spoken, but a large proportion of the children speak Irish also, and I am credibly informed that there are many children who speak Irish only. I have met here a few Americans, respectable and intelligent men, natives of Portland, who speak Irish very fluently and pride themselves in being able to speak it.”

St. Patrick’s Day in Hartford

Rogers wrote several Jottings columns about Hartford, notably a detailed report on St. Patrick’s Day 1873. The celebration, he said, “quite exceeded all expectations in splendor, enthusiasm and effect; nor did the unpropitious weather which ushered in the day and continued unabated throughout the day and evening. The girls can all save plenty of money and so can all the men, too, except such of them as are too fond of drink. Here, however, we enforce the rule of strict sobriety, and the rule is observed.”

Oddly enough, the festivities began at 9 a.m., when, “The two divisions of the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Hartford, conducted by their state delegate, Mr. Patrick Daley … marched, amidst the most enthusiastic cheering, to the railroad depot from which they started for New Haven to participate in the celebration in that city.”

“At 10 o’clock, solemn High Masses were sung — in St. Patrick’s Church … and in St. Peter’s … These Masses were attended by all the societies and bands in their regalia and uniforms, with uplifted banners; and by as many other citizens as could effect an entrance.”

Led by Chief Marshal Thomas F. Galvin and the Manchester Cornet Band, the Hartford parade commenced at noon and continued for three hours through heavy rain and muddy streets. On a raised platform in front of the Capital, dignitaries including Lt. Gov. Sils, Mayor Robinson and city government leaders reviewed the marching units.

The units were varied: A platoon of police officers led by John Lynch, “an eminent equestrian mounted on a prancing steed,” St. Patrick’s Benevolent Society, St. John’s Sick and Benevolent Society, St. Patrick’s Temperance Society led by the Douglas Band of Middletown directed by Capt. Stack, St. Peter’s Total Abstinence Society numbering 500 members, St. Peter’s Juvenile Cadets, St. Mary’s Total Abstinence Society of Windsor Locks.

Clergymen rode in “a four-in-hand chariot, the horses in silver-mounted harness and the chariot emblazoned in the highest style of art,” and driven by a Mr. Teehan.

The parade was followed by “sumptuous dinners at various hotels,” and in the evening, “the city was enlivened by the distant sounds of music from various points.”

At 8 p.m., an immense crowd filled Allyn Hall for a lecture by Father Goodwin of East Hartford on the topic, “The Past Career and Future Prospects of the Irish Race.”

The final event of the day was a 10 p.m. Knights of St. Patrick banquet in the reception room of the Allyn House. The Knights were newly organized and already had a membership of about 75. Their officers included: Thomas Duffy, president; Dr. Collins, first vice president; Edward Lawler, second vice president, Dr. John Cody, treasurer; J.B. Shannon, secretary, and Richard McCcloud, corresponding secretary.

The dining hall was decorated with Irish and American flags and wreaths of shamrocks. On one table was a touching memento: “a pot of Irish ivy and shamrocks presented by Mrs. Edward Lawler who had them imported for the occasion. They arrived some time ago by the steamer City of Washington in a pot filled with Irish soil.

Many friends having begged a ‘pinch’ of the earth to mingle with that of their deceased relatives in the Catholic cemetery, the diminished contents had to be replaced with American soil which now exhibits a luxurious growth of shamrock and ivy of Irish-American production. The ivy was taken from the ancestral abode of Mr. Lawler and the shamrock from the ancient seat of the princes of Offaly.”

The banquet was accompanied by the customary round of toasts to “the Day we Celebrate,” “the United States, the Land of our Adoption, “the State of Connecticut,” “the City of Hartford,” “the Medical Profession,” “the Irish element in America,” “the Press,” “the Ladies,” and “the Knights of St. Patrick.”

Rogers wrote: “About four o’clock in the morning, this agreeable and happy entertainment came to a close.”

Industrial jobs

Wherever he traveled in Connecticut, Rogers observed that Irish immigrants, both men and women, were employed in factory jobs.

In Manchester, on the eastern side of the Connecticut River near Hartford, the major employer was the Cheney brothers silk
mills, which employed “over 1,000 operatives.” Rogers wrote that about two-thirds of those workers were Irish and that about two-thirds of the Irish were women.

Most of them worked in a new building which “whether as regards extent, splendor, improved machinery and arrangements, regular discipline and respectability of its operations, and quantity and quality of the silks it turns out, holds perhaps first place among the silk factories of America.”

The Irish had a small Catholic church in North Manchester, Rogers said, “but it has become far too small, owing to the enormous increase of Catholic inhabitants who now amount to upwards of 1,600 souls, though when its excellent and popular pastor, Father James F. Campbell, took charge five years ago the Catholic population was not one-fourth of what it is now.”

In the Wolcottville section of Torrington, Rogers found “a large brass foundry, where about 150 hands, nearly all Irish, are employed and the celebrated skate factory said to be the largest of its sort in America where some 10,000 skates are made weekly.”

Richard Carroll, a 49-year-old native of Ireland and manager of the skate and kitchen knife department, gave Rogers a guided tour of the latter plant including a new addition in which a number of other products such as handles for chisels, button-hook handles and policemen’s buttons were manufactured.

In the Kensington section of the town of Berlin, Rogers wrote, “upwards of 500 Irishmen are now employed in two large factories ... I visited Hart, Blevin & Mead’s Foundry and Manufactory, established in 1836 whose capital is $500,000 and who employ 400 hands of whom two-thirds are Irish, and who manufacture not hundreds but thousands of articles from iron, steel and brass of all sorts of hardware.

One of the inevitable results of the employment of that many Irish was an expansion of the Catholic church. Rogers reported, “Father Daly and Father Mullins of New Britain say Mass here in a large hall on Sundays, and Father Daly is making preparations for the erection of a handsome church here.”

In Meriden, Rogers toured the iron and brass foundries and factory of Parker, Whipple & Co. situated “in a lonely glen quite under the highest peaks of the Hanging Mountains ... In the iron foundry 24 hands are employed of whom about 20 are moulders, who cast not less than 20 different sorts of locks, all sorts of housing trimmings, doorknobs, shelf brackets, umbrella stands, door plates and building hardware.

“The total number of hands employed in both iron and brass foundries and the factories is about 200 ... This factory consists of one large building and three smaller ones, I was afforded an opportunity of seeing the great quantity and variety of the articles made here ... having been conducted through the various departments by Timothy O’Neill, John S. Judge, Hugh Mulvy, Thomas Farley, Owen McGourlie and Michael Russell. A large proportion of the operators are Irish, including nearly all the foundry hands ...”

In most cases, the Irish described by Rogers were factory hands, but in at least several instances, Irishmen owned the business. "In Middletown a few days ago," wrote Rogers, "I visited the flour barrel factory of Mr. Charles Fitzgerald. The various parts are made in distant cities, and by machinery and put together here. The staves are made in Ohio and the heads in Vermont. Mr. Fitzgerald has another barrel factory in Hartford, having in that city Mr. Thomas Butler, for his partner. Each of these two factories turns out 300 barrels per week, the one in Middletown supplying the Middletown Joint Stock Company of Smith & Co., and the Hartford shop supplying French’s Flour Mills.

Rogers noted, too, that in New Haven construction of the new railroad depot “is progressing vigorously and is already raised to considerable height by its contractors, the enterprise and now eminent firm of Messrs. John Maher & Son.” The principals in the firm were Patrick Maher, the school board member, and his brother John. They were, wrote Rogers, “the first Irish bricklayers to reside in New Haven, having arrived here in 1847 from New York.”

The depot was a three-story building of brownstone from the Portland quarries and North Haven brick. The first floor waiting room was designed similar to Grand Central Depot in New York. The other two floors contained office suites for the six railroads whose lines passed through New Haven.

In the New Haven suburb of Westville, Rogers came upon another Irish entrepreneur. “Last week I visited Gorman’s match factory in Westville, which is built on a beautiful site, with extensive grounds adjoining, under the very shadow of West Rock, one of the greatest natural ornaments of New Haven. (The factory) was built here 20 years ago by its present proprietor, Mr. Thomas Gorman, and was then one of its sort in New England. All the sticks for matches are cut and kilndried in Canada for economy in labor and sent here in boxes about three boxes of 15 gross each arriving every week.

“This year, Mr. Gorman rebuilt the factory and introduced all the newest improvements with steam power, &c. The present building is provided with nine machines and keeps 40 hands in constant employment, besides as many as 250 hands at outdoor work, by far the greatest part of the work being carried on outside. The matches made here besides being used throughout the northern and southern states, are also very extensively used in Mexico, the West India Islands and South America.

"Mr. Gorman at his own expense provided a band in the parade for the newly organized St. Joseph’s Total Abstinence Society of Westville. On the preceding Sunday his daughter, Miss Minnie Gorman, presented the society with a handsome new banner having on front fine portraits of St. Joseph and Father Matthew, and on the reverse those of Washington and the Maid of Erin. The presentation took place in the newly erected church of St. Joseph in Westville before a large assemblage.

"The new society, which at present numbers about 50 members, attracted attention in the parade by their handsome regalia and excellent military training. In this last
acquisition, they are indebted to one of their officers, Mr. Michael Sarsfield, who has been through the late war, on his reminiscences of which, as also on temperance and Irish subjects, he devotes much of his time lecturing of late."

**Political gains**

In late 1873, Rogers was able to report that, thanks to their proliferation throughout the state, the Irish were also beginning to have more of a voice in political decisions.

Mr. Patrick Egan, he wrote, was elected by the voters of Beacon Falls to represent that town in the Connecticut General Assembly. In fact, according to Rogers, Egan was "the only member of either branch of that body who is recorded in the registry of the legislature as being of Irish birth, though the last session contained two other Catholics, both Americans of Irish parentage."

Egan was also a coroner and justice of the peace in Beacon Falls and the only Catholic judge in Connecticut. "Though he is a Democrat," wrote Rogers, "the Republican town of Beacon Falls elected him by a large majority as a proof of their confidence and esteem for him in consideration of his honesty, earnestness and indomitable energy."

**Temperance activities**

Rogers wrote about numerous temperance societies and temperance activities wherever he went in Connecticut. To some extent that may have been because of his strong interest in temperance, but it probably also was an indication of how widespread and how influential the temperance movement was among the Irish.

He devoted one entire installment of *Jottings On The Way* to the fourth annual state temperance convention in Norwich in mid-September of 1873. He described it as the "largest and most successful yet held ..."

Rogers wrote that each temperance society could send one delegate for each 50 of its members, and he listed delegates from more than 20 communities from every region of the state:

- St. Mary's, New Haven: John McSweeney, Thomas Callaghan.
- St. John's, Bridgeport: James O'Brien, James Fitzgerald, David O'Dowd, Patrick Burns.
- St. Francis, Fair Haven: Thomas J. Reynolds, J. J. Dohan, Peter J. Bree.
- St. Patrick's, Wallingford: Matthew Harland.
- St. Mary's, Hamden: Thomas Carmon.
- Father Mathew's, Ansonia: John Cahill, Timothy O'Sullivan.
- Waterbury: Henry Byrne, Patrick Hallahan, Michael A. Balfe, James J. McDonald.
- St. Patrick's, Wolcottville: Michael Cooke.
- Father Mathew's, Bristol: Denis H. Tierney.
- St. Mary's, Windsor Locks: C. Kelly, T. Broderick.
- St. Mary's, New Britain: Edward J. Lynch, Thomas Emmet, Michael E. Shanahan.
- St. Patrick's, Bridgeport: James Healy, Charles Henry.
- St. Patrick's, East Bridgeport: P. J. Coyle, P. Tate.
- Father Mathew's, Bridgeport: Daniel Murphy, Patrick Keermenly.
- St. Vincent DePaul's, Danbury: James Doran, Thaddeus Rooney.
- St. Edward's, Stafford Springs: Jeremiah Gallivan.
- St. Joseph's, Willimantic: L. Flynn, James
Every train arriving the previous day and night was filled with delegates from all parts of Connecticut, said Rogers, and at 6:30 on Wednesday morning the convention went in a body to St. Mary’s Church to hear Mass, the president of the Catholic State Temperance Union, the Rev. Lawrence Walsh, officiating.

At 10 o’clock, the convention was called to order by Father Walsh, in Breed Hall, which was decorated with Irish and American flags and temperance banners. Patrick Cafferty, president of the Norwich T. A. Society oversaw the arrangements.

Evaluation

All told, James Rogers wrote and The Irish-American newspaper printed at least 49 “Jottings By The Way” columns from late 1872 until late 1874. In so doing, they guaranteed the preservation of a valuable collection of the history of Irish immigrants to Connecticut in that era.

One unfortunate aspect of the collection of Rogers’ jottings is that he apparently never did get to cover the entire state. Most of the columns that have come to light were written about his observations of that part of Connecticut that today is the Interstate 91 corridor running south and north through the middle of the state.

He began with several letters from New Haven, at that time the most populous and most Irish city in Connecticut. And he continued generally northward to places like Middletown, Meriden, Wallingford, Berlin, Plainville, Portland, New Britain and Hartford. The farthest he seems to have gone east was to the temperance convention in Norwich. To the west, he wrote columns from as far as Torrington and Winsted.

Hopefully, further research may come upon other “Jottings By The Way” columns from places like Danbury and Willimantic and from shoreline cities such as Stamford, Bridgeport and New London.

But even if that never happens, what James Rogers did write, especially about visits to schools, factories, churches, temperance meetings, etc., provides valuable eyewitness accounts of the kind of Main Street history that often is overlooked in more formal books and studies.

Sources: Issues of The Irish-American can be found online at genealogybank.com.