

# *St. Patrick's Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto:*

## *A Study of Immigrant Adjustment and Elite Control*

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*This study traces the evolution of St. Patrick's Day parades in nineteenth-century Toronto. Conflict between different elements both for control of the parade and over the form which it should assume suggests a struggle for control of the Irish Catholic immigrant community and a tension between strategies of protest and accommodation as appropriate responses to the host society. These tensions had been largely resolved by the 1870s and the abandonment of the parades may be seen as a crucial indice of Irish Catholic assimilation.*

*Le présent article retrace l'évolution des défilés de la Saint-Patrick à Toronto au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces manifestations populaires font l'objet de conflits entre divers groupes qui veulent les contrôler et en déterminer la forme. Les rivalités laissent voir une lutte pour l'obtention du pouvoir sur les immigrants irlandais catholiques et elles s'expriment aussi par l'élaboration de stratégies différentes, soit de protestation, soit de compromis, face à la société d'accueil. Ces tensions sont résolues pour une bonne part dans les années 1870 et l'abandon des défilés peut alors être perçu comme un indice crucial de l'assimilation des Irlandais catholiques.*

Irish immigrants brought to nineteenth-century British North America a rich and diverse cultural heritage which continued to flourish in the areas they settled. A particular fondness for parades and processions was part of this inheritance and annual demonstrations commemorating the Battle of the Boyne and the feast of St. Patrick were soon commonplace throughout the colonies. In the charged sectarian climate of Ireland, however, "parades were at the very centre of the territorial...political and economic struggle" and these connotations were also transplanted.<sup>1</sup> Especially in Toronto, where Catholic and Protestant Irish congregated in large numbers, parades frequently became the occasion of violent confrontation between Orange and Green.<sup>2</sup> But while

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1. S.E. Baker, "Orange and Green: Belfast, 1832-1912", in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Vol. II (London and Boston: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1973), 790; D.W. Miller, "The Armagh Troubles, 1784-87", in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly, Jr., eds., *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 174-176.

2. G.S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class", in R. O'Driscoll and C. Reynolds, eds., *The Untold Story: The Irish in Canada* (Toronto: Celtic Arts of Canada, 1988), 841-847.

the July 12 activities of the Orange Order figure prominently in Canadian historiography, little attention has been paid to St. Patrick's Day celebrations or their significance for Irish Catholic immigrants. This study seeks to redress this imbalance by tracing the evolution of St. Patrick's Day parades in nineteenth-century Toronto, beginning with a close examination of the 1863 celebration which was one of the largest and most impressive on record.

The tone was set the previous evening by the garrison drums beating "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" and this was followed by the Hibernian Benevolent Society band's late night promenade, "discoursing some of the choicest [Irish] national airs". Crowds began to gather at St. Paul's Church on King Street early the next morning and at ten o'clock, the procession began marching towards St. Michael's Cathedral. About two thousand strong, the assemblage was drawn largely from the "humbler elements", some of whom had reportedly journeyed to the city from surrounding districts. The Cathedral was "filled to its utmost capacity" for the mass which was celebrated by Bishop John Joseph Lynch, assisted by over a dozen other Irish priests from the Toronto diocese. The high point of the service was undoubtedly the sermon delivered by the Bishop on the exploits of the "glorious saint", concluding with an exposition on the providential mission of the Irish diaspora to spread Catholicism to the four corners of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Religious obligations having been fulfilled, the procession then reformed and paraded through the principal streets of the city. Led by the Hibernian band, whose repertoire seemed to consist of nostalgic and militant tunes in equal measure, the procession swelled even further as it slowly returned to St. Paul's Church. Here, a platform had been erected for the occasion and various notables, including the Bishop, members of the clergy, prominent Catholics and officers of various Irish organizations addressed the crowd. The obvious favourite, however, was Michael Murphy, president of the Hibernian Benevolent Society. Murphy's oration was received with "loud cheers and applause", especially when he denounced British government in Ireland as "radically wrong" and compared it to the suffering of the Polish people under a "powerful military despotism". But he prophesied that Irish deliverance was at hand from an organization rapidly growing among her exiles. In Canada alone, he claimed, there were twenty thousand Irishmen ready to rally to the cause:

...three-fourths of the Catholic Irish of this country would offer themselves as an offering on the altar of freedom, to elevate their country and raise her again to her position in the list of nations. Nothing could resist the Irish pike when grasped by the sinewy arm of the Celt.<sup>4</sup>

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3. This report was taken from the *Irish Canadian*, 18 March 1863; the *Canadian Freeman*, 19 March 1863; and the *Globe*, 18 March 1863.

4. *Irish Canadian*, 18 March 1863.

Murphy then commended the Hibernians for keeping the spirit of Irish nationality alive in Canada, despite the opposition and hostility which this evoked from the host society. But he ended in a more conciliatory tone by expressing "perfect satisfaction" with the laws of Canada because, here, the people "were their own law-makers".<sup>5</sup> When the speeches were over, the procession broke up into smaller parties and soirées which lasted late into the night. And "thus passed away one of the most pleasant St. Patrick's Days we have ever spent in Toronto."<sup>6</sup>

For those who participated, almost exclusively Catholic Irish immigrants, the St. Patrick's Day celebration was obviously an extremely important event. On a social level, it provided a holiday from work and an occasion to parade about the city dressed in their Sunday best. Those who lived outside the city could visit friends and relatives, shop at the large stores and partake of the excitement of city life for a day. This influx undoubtedly provided a welcomed boost for the many Irish cabmen, store-keepers and tavern-keepers who lived a normally precarious existence. For the pious, it was an occasion to worship, for the notables an opportunity to speechify and revel in a stature which rarely extended beyond that day. But the event also had a deeper significance, for it was, in essence, a communal demonstration, an annual and very public assertion of Irish Catholic presence and solidarity in Toronto. It was perhaps the one day in the year on which Irish Catholics could claim the city as their own and proudly publicize their distinctiveness on the main streets. The ritualistic nature of the celebrations — with parades, masses and speeches being constants — obviously played a vital role in rekindling tribal memories and inculcating the collective consciousness necessary for re forging a group identity in a new environment. St. Patrick's Day parades were therefore central both to the emergence of Irish Catholic ethnicity in Toronto and to the communication of identity to the host society.<sup>7</sup>

The celebrations also reflected the interests and aspirations of those who assumed direct responsibility for organizing them. Since high visibility and prestige were the rewards, control of the event allowed different elements to establish supremacy within the Irish Catholic community, to impose their stamp on the group's corporate image and thereby to decisively influence its relations with the larger society. Thus, the intermittent struggle both for control of the celebrations and over the form which they should take revealed a great deal about the experience of Irish Catholic immigrants as they adjusted

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5. *Ibid.*

6. *Canadian Freeman*, 19 March 1863.

7. St. Patrick's Day celebrations as an institution within the Irish diaspora have received surprisingly little attention. See C.J. Fahey, "Reflections on the St. Patrick's Day Orations of John Ireland", *Ethnicity*, Vol. II (1975), 244-257; O. MacDonagh, "Irish Culture and Nationalism Translated: St. Patrick's Day, 1888 in Australia", in O. MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle and P. Travers, eds., *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 69-82.

to an unfamiliar and often hostile environment. Like most ethnic groups, the Irish oscillated between the extremes of separation and integration, persistence and assimilation; and the celebration of the feast of St. Patrick was central to the resolution of these internal tensions for Irish immigrants in Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, to the host society comprising largely Loyalist and British settlers, the event had a very different significance. An annual reminder of the existence of a substantial alien Irish presence, it also demonstrated the determination of these immigrants, once settled into the country, to preserve aspects of their traditional culture. More ominously, speeches such as that delivered by Michael Murphy in 1863 evidenced a continued Irish obsession with the problems of their homeland, and the frequent violence which accompanied the parades demonstrated that the importation of these problems to British North America could prove extremely disruptive. Hence, the Canadian press was less than enthusiastic in its coverage of the event, expressing the wish that such celebrations, and the Old World orientation which they represented, would shortly be abandoned.<sup>9</sup>

The establishment of the Toronto St. Patrick's Society in 1832 attested to the growing Irish presence in the city and by 1861, Irish Catholics constituted over one-quarter of the population. However, a sharp decrease in immigration and steady out-migration contributed to their decline as a percentage of the population thereafter.<sup>10</sup> Early St. Patrick's Day celebrations were usually low-key affairs — concerts, balls and soirées — which brought together the Irish elite to honour their patron saint and indulge their penchant for sentimental and self-congratulatory speeches.<sup>11</sup> Largely free from the sectarian biases so evident in the 1860s, they suggested a cordiality between early Catholic and Protestant immigrants. But while the St. Patrick's Society survived into the 1850s, the inclusive definition of Irish ethnicity which sustained it was undermined by the Famine immigration of the late 1840s. Since Catholics predominated among those who settled in Toronto, this influx shattered the virtual Protestant consensus which had previously existed, and the destitution of many of these Famine victims further contributed to a nativistic backlash from the host society.<sup>12</sup> This prejudice prompted Irish Protestants to dissociate themselves from their unpopular Catholic counterparts and instead to look to the Protestant, loyalist values of the Orange Order

8. J. Higham, ed., *Ethnic Leadership in America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 1-18.

9. *Leader*, 18 March 1863; and *Globe*, 18 March 1863.

10. For a demographic profile of Irish Catholics in Toronto, see Table 1.

11. *Mirror*, 19 March 1841 and 24 March 1843.

12. G.J. Parr, "The Welcome and the Wake: Attitudes in Canada West Toward the Irish Famine Migration", *Ontario History*, Vol. LXVI (1974), 101-113; K. Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. II (1965), 19-40; D. Connor, "The Irish Canadians: Image and Self-Image" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976), 50-92.

as the focus of their identity.<sup>13</sup> But since Catholics found themselves largely consigned to the lowest ranks of the occupational hierarchy and excluded from the emerging British Protestant colonial consensus, their response was to withdraw into an exclusive and essentially defensive form of ethnicity.<sup>14</sup> By the 1860s, the polarization of Irish immigrants along religious and cultural lines was complete and observers noted that the "Irish constitute in some sort two peoples: the line of division being one of religion and...one of race."<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1** Population of Toronto, 1848-1881

Date	Irish	Catholic	Total
1848	1,695	5,903	25,503
1851	11,305	7,940	30,775
1861	12,441	12,125	44,821
1871	10,336	11,881	56,092
1881	10,781	15,716	86,415

Source: Census of Canada, 1848-1881.

**Table 2** Irish Catholic Occupational Profile, 1860

Unskilled	45.0%
Semi-skilled	13.5%
Skilled	12.1%
Clerical	2.8%
Business	16.7%
Professional	3.3%
Private means	6.6%

Source: B. Clarke, "Piety, Nationalism and Fraternity: The Rise of Irish Catholic Voluntary Associations in Toronto, 1850-1895" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1986), 33.

These changes were reflected in the way in which St. Patrick's Day was celebrated, as the 17 of March became increasingly identified with Irish Catholicism. Partly a response to rejection by the host society and dissociation of the Protestant Irish, this development was also encouraged by elements within the Irish Catholic community. After the Famine, the Roman Catholic Church created a network of social and religious institutions to assist the

13. D.S. Shea, "The Irish Immigrant Adjustment to Toronto: 1840-1860", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association. Study Sessions* (1972), 55-56; C. Houston and W.J. Smyth, "Transferred Loyalties: Orangeism in the United States and Canada", *American Review of Canadian Studies*, Vol. XIV (1984), 193-211; G.S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class", in G.S. Kealey and P. Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 13-34.

14. For an occupational profile of Irish Catholics in Toronto, see Table 2.

15. *Leader*, 25 January 1862.

adjustment of Irish immigrants and re-establish clerical control over their lives.<sup>16</sup> After a few small scale and generally disorganized parades in the late 1840s, the clergy soon enlisted St. Patrick in their campaign and by the early 1850s, the annual celebration revolved primarily around the Catholic Church. Organized and led by Church-sponsored societies, processions to the Cathedral now became a regular feature and the clergy assumed a prominent role throughout.<sup>17</sup> But though the celebrations became larger and more public, the mass was clearly the focus of the event, and the sermons preached on these occasions had the effect both of strengthening the association between Irishness and Catholicism and of fostering a sense of ethno-religious particularism among Irish Catholic immigrants. The heroic figure of St. Patrick provided an easy continuity between the Irish history of persecution and their current experience as unwelcomed exiles in a strange land, and served as a rallying symbol for Irish Catholics in the New World, as Father Synnot's exhortation of 1855 indicates:

Go on then, faithful, noble and generous children of St. Patrick, in your glorious career...keep your eyes ever fixed on the faith of St. Patrick which shall ever be for you a fixed star by night and a pillar of light by day — forget not the examples and memorable deeds of your fathers — be faithful to the doctrines of your great apostle. A voice that speaks on the leaf of the shamrock — that speaks in the dismantled and ruined abbeys of lovely Erin — yea a voice that still speaks on the tombstones of your martyred fathers and in the homes of your exiled countrymen — be faithful to the glorious legacy he has bequeathed to you.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1850s, then, the Roman Catholic Church was instrumental in transforming St. Patrick's Day into an essentially religious event, to establish Catholicism as the primary identity of Irish immigrants and thereby strengthen clerical authority. For by encouraging Irish immigrants to see themselves first as Catholics and to hold themselves aloof from the Protestant majority, the clergy reinforced their claim to leadership and control. But the Catholic Church was unable to satisfy all the needs of Irish immigrants. Under the French-born Bishop Armand de Charbonnel, it was unable to express the cultural or political nationalism which these immigrants transported as baggage.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the group's organizational infrastructure was so tightly

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16. M.W. Nicolson, "The Catholic Church and the Irish in Victorian Toronto" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Guelph, 1981); *idem*, "Irish Tridentine Catholicism in Victorian Toronto: Vessel for Ethno-Religious Persistence", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association. Study Sessions*, Vol. L (1983), 415-436; B.P. Clarke, "Piety, Nationalism and Fraternity: The Rise of Irish Catholic Voluntary Associations in Toronto, 1850-1895" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1986), Vol. I.

17. *Mirror*, 7 March 1851; 14 March 1852; and 11 March 1853.

18. *Mirror*, 23 March 1855.

19. For the complex relationship between Catholicism and nationalism in Irish culture, see L.J. McCaffrey, "Irish Catholicism and Irish Nationalism: A Study in Cultural Identity", *Church History*, Vol. XLII (1973), 524-534.

controlled by the clergy that it frustrated the desire for leadership and initiative among the Irish Catholic laity, especially the small but ambitious middle class which began to emerge in the mid-1850s.<sup>20</sup>

Irish nationalism provided one of the few rationales for lay initiative independent of the clergy, and it also served both as a catalyst and a vehicle for expressing the growing ethnic consciousness among Irish Catholics in Toronto.<sup>21</sup> Indicative of this was the establishment, in 1855, of the exclusively Catholic Young Men's St. Patrick's Association, an ethnic organization which sought to provide a social life for Irish immigrants, based on their traditional culture, and to secure their collective advancement in Toronto.<sup>22</sup> Animated by the Irish Catholic middle class, it quickly moved to put its stamp on what had become the group's leading communal event, and in the late 1850s, the new lay elite assumed responsibility for organizing the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

Under their auspices, the event changed dramatically. Parades, which had previously been merely a prelude to the mass, now increased in size and colour to become major public demonstrations. In 1857, over one thousand people, their faces animated by "a sacred patriotic fire", marched behind four hundred members of the Young Men's St. Patrick's Association.<sup>23</sup> Religious hymns were replaced by popular tunes and secular emblems such as shamrocks, harps and wolfhounds were now more prominent than Catholic icons. As the clergy lost their previous stature in the extra-Cathedral festivities, the whole tone of these events also changed. Clerically-induced temperance gave way to alcoholic good cheer, and instead of the expressions of loyalty and three cheers for the Queen, which had previously characterized the proceedings, mildly anglophobic speeches were now heard.<sup>24</sup>

Alienated from the larger society by a growing 'No Popery' crusade which was expressed through the mainstream press and the hostile activities of the Orange Order, Irish Catholics in the late 1850s used St. Patrick's Day parades to assert their ethno-religious distinctiveness and protest their marginalized position within the city. But changes in the parade also reflected a shift in the internal dynamics of the group, as a struggle was clearly developing between the clergy and members of the laity for leadership and control of the Irish Catholic community. While the latter agreed that Catholicism defined the parameters of Irish ethnicity, they emphasized a secular and cultural dimension to this identity which went beyond the clergy's

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20. The best evidence for the existence of this middle class was the proliferation of advertisements for wholesale establishments and professional services in the Irish ethnic press. See the *Mirror* or *Canadian Freeman*, 1850s.

21. The emergence of lay voluntary organizations revolving around Irish nationalism is explored in detail in Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations, Vol. II".

22. *Mirror*, 30 November and 21 December 1855.

23. *Mirror*, 20 March 1857.

24. *Ibid.*

narrowly religious vision. These tensions were demonstrated by Bishop de Charbonnel's refusal, in 1856, to hold mass to coincide with the parade, but the events of St. Patrick's Day 1858 healed this rift, at least temporarily.<sup>25</sup>

The growth of the Catholic population in the city, its increasing visibility and public assertiveness on occasions such as St. Patrick's Day were all seen as evidence of a growing menace by Upper Canadian Protestants already inflamed by the British Papal aggression crisis and the American Know-Nothing movement.<sup>26</sup> The parades, especially, were seen as unduly provocative by the Orange Order which had become the most popular vehicle for expressing militant Protestantism in Upper Canada.<sup>27</sup> This tension boiled over in 1858 when Orange attempts to disrupt the parade resulted in widespread violence during which one Catholic was fatally stabbed with a pitchfork.<sup>28</sup>

Coming at a time of growing self-confidence and rising expectations among the Catholic Irish population, this debacle was a sobering experience, for it demonstrated both the continued hostility of their traditional Orange enemies and the vulnerability which Catholics faced as a consequence of their minority position in Toronto. Moreover, the blatant partisanship of the police and judiciary indicated where the sympathies of the authorities lay, and served notice that the triumphalist behaviour involved in the parades was out of place in a community subscribing to a British and Protestant consensus.<sup>29</sup> As a result, both lay and clerical Irish leaders concluded that a lower public profile would have to be adopted if the acceptance, recognition and prosperity which they desired were to be achieved. This new spirit of conciliation and moderation was expressed most clearly by the decision to forego public processions on St. Patrick's Day for an indefinite period. The suspension of the parades for the next three years followed a conscious decision of the Irish elite to relinquish their right to the streets in the interests of public harmony. Yet, while this moderation forwarded the desires of the clergy and middle class for an accommodation with the Canadian establishment, it did not meet acquiescence from all elements within the Irish Catholic community, and it was soon challenged by rumblings from below.

The murder of Matthew Sheedy by Orangemen on St. Patrick's Day 1858 was symptomatic of the growing hostility experienced by Irish Catholics in Toronto. Prejudice, harassment and attacks on Catholic priests and Church

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25. *Mirror*, 28 March 1856.

26. J.R. Miller, "Bigotry in the North Atlantic Triangle: Irish, British and American Influences on Canadian Anti-Catholicism, 1850-1900", *Studies in Religion*, Vol. XVI (1987), 289-301.

27. The power of the Order was perhaps best demonstrated by its virtual stranglehold on municipal politics for much of the nineteenth century. See G.S. Kealey, "The Union of the Canadas", in V.L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historic Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 41-86.

28. P. Toner, "The Rise of Irish Nationalism in Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, National University of Ireland, 1974), 27-35; Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations", 305-307.

29. *Globe*, 18 and 19 March 1858; *Leader*, 18 and 19 March 1858.



property all contributed to the growth of a siege mentality among Catholics. While this beleaguement produced the above-mentioned conciliatory stance from the Irish elite, it also generated a more militant response in the form of the Hibernian Benevolent Society. Established after the 1858 debacle to protect Catholics from Orange aggression, the Hibernians invoked the traditional Irish peasant prerogative of self-defense in the face of the failure of the authorities to secure their rights or redress their grievances. But they soon rose above these Ribbonite roots and by the early 1860s, had evolved into a full-fledged ethnic voluntary organization.<sup>30</sup> As well as rendering Toronto safer for Catholics, the Hibernians took over, from the Young Men's St. Patrick's Association, the tasks of generating an extensive social life and material benefits for its largely working-class male members. In keeping with the values of the latter, the organization also sought to inject a more aggressively nationalistic spirit into the Irish community to engender pride and self-confidence, thereby strengthening the demand for recognition and respect for the Irish in Toronto.<sup>31</sup>

One of their first steps in this direction was to reassert the Irish Catholic right to the streets of the city by resuming parades on St. Patrick's Day. Unlike the Young Men's St. Patrick's Association which had openly flouted the authority of the clergy, however, the Hibernians showed great deference to the new Bishop of Toronto, John Joseph Lynch. When the Hibernians sought clerical permission to revive the parades, in 1862, Lynch supported their decision despite strong opposition from "the most respectable Catholic inhabitants of the city". Led by members of the now-defunct Young Men's St. Patrick's Association, they argued that a resumption of public processions would inevitably provoke a confrontation with the Orangemen, and since Catholics would automatically be depicted as the aggressors, the good feelings which developed from their suspension would be lost. Lynch was thus implored to ban the parade or at the very least to "hold mass at such an hour as not to suit the procession".<sup>32</sup> But the Bishop chose to ignore their warnings and not only granted his approval, but addressed the parade from the steps of the cathedral and commended the Hibernians for their "noble efforts on behalf of faith and fatherland".<sup>33</sup>

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30. For an introduction to the Ribbonite tradition, see T. Garvin, "Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland", *Past and Present*, Vol. LXXXVI (1982), 133-155; and J. Lee, "The Ribbonmen", in T.D. Williams, ed., *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 26-35.

31. Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations", esp. 289-329; G. Sheppard, "God Save the Green: Fenianism and Fellowship in Victorian Ontario", *Histoire Sociale—Social History*, Vol. XX (1987), 129-144.

32. Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto (henceforth A.A.T.), Archbishop Lynch Papers, Rev. G.R. Northgraves to Lynch, 4 March 1865.

33. *Leader*, 18 March 1862 and *Canadian Freeman*, 20 March 1862.

This dispute over the resumption of the parades suggested an on-going conflict within the Irish Catholic community about the appropriate response to their countries of origin and of adoption, and acute divisions on the strategy which would best secure them a comfortable niche in the latter. Upwardly mobile middle-class immigrants argued that the best route to success lay in winning the confidence of the host society by quietly discarding those aspects of their traditional culture which were found objectionable and by working through the political system to redress outstanding grievances. But the organized Irish working class, in the form of the Hibernians, rejected the timidity and abandonment of cultural distinctiveness which this policy entailed, and instead demanded a more vigorous assertion of the Irish Catholic presence in the city.<sup>34</sup> For symbolic effect, the St. Patrick's Day parade surpassed all else, since it represented both a commitment to the preservation of Irish culture and an insistence on the right to advertise this distinctiveness on the streets of Toronto.<sup>35</sup>

This conflict between strategies of accommodation and protest constitutes the typical dilemma faced by ethnic groups in a new environment and is frequently related to economic adjustment. Ironically, it was the Irish middle class which had first resorted to protest in the mid-1850s, only to retreat from ethnic militancy once it became obvious that this jeopardized its attainment of social acceptance and economic prosperity. Control of the parades had now changed hands and since this event provided one of the major opportunities for lay initiative, it seems that leadership of Irish-Catholic ethnicity in Toronto was passing from the moderate and accommodationist middle class to the militantly separatist lower class. The power and prestige of the Roman Catholic clergy were also demonstrated by this embroglio, however, for Bishop Lynch's moral role as adjudicator between the warring lay factions was clearly recognized. On this occasion, he sided with the Hibernians, primarily because their uncompromising nationalism reinforced the Church's attempt to foster religious particularism and strengthened the hierarchy's claim to communal leadership.<sup>36</sup> But the limits of this control would soon be tested and the alliance between clergy and nationalists severely strained in the process.

Unknown to Bishop Lynch, the Hibernians established contact with the revolutionary American Fenian Brotherhood in 1859, and the Hibernian president, Michael Murphy, became head-centre of the Fenian organization in the Toronto area. Although sworn Fenians were always a minority of the

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34. Occupational profiles of Hibernian membership demonstrate it was "predominantly a working-class organization". Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations", 365-366.

35. *Canadian Freeman*, 20 March 1862; *Irish Canadian*, 18 March 1863 and 23 March 1864.

36. A.A.T., Lynch Papers, Bishop Lynch to Bishop Farrell, 12 August 1865 and Bishop Lynch to Archbishop T. Connolly, 1 February 1866.

Hibernians' membership, the organization became more militant under their influence. The establishment in January 1863 of the weekly ethnic newspaper, the *Irish Canadian*, further evidenced their increasing sophistication, for this mouthpiece augmented their influence within the Irish-Catholic community and enabled the Fenians to articulate their concerns to the larger society. Under the editorship of Patrick Boyle, the *Irish Canadian* sought to "link the past with the present, the old country with the new", and propagated the simple message that religion, patriotism and support for the liberation of Ireland were all inseparably linked with the demand for Irish recognition and the achievement of prosperity, success and respect in their new environment.<sup>37</sup>

The prominence which the Hibernians established within the Irish Catholic community was demonstrated by their complete control of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the early 1860s. As statements of Irish protest and radicalism, they surpassed all previous efforts. The years 1863 and 1864 saw the largest parades on record and in keeping with Hibernian membership, those who led and those who followed were increasingly drawn from the Irish Catholic lower class. A new militancy was apparent in the playing of martial tunes such as "The Croppy Boy", "God Save Ireland" and "The Rising of the Moon", and changes in the route of the parade also suggested a spirit of confrontation previously lacking. These two parades covered a wider territory than ever before and while this was obviously designed to assert their right to the entire city, the provocation involved in marching past so many Orange lodges could not have been lost on the organizers. Even more ominous was the proliferation of Fenian sunburst banners among the crowd and the open expressions of support for Fenianism which concluded both of these parades.<sup>38</sup>

Bordering on treason, Murphy's speeches incurred the wrath of the host society and also alienated many Irish Catholics who feared the new radicalism he represented. Led by Thomas D'Arcy McGee, moderates argued that the Fenian-sympathizing Hibernians would confirm the stereotype of Irish disloyalty held by the host society, inevitably prompting a violent reaction from the Orange Order. Even sympathetic Protestants would be alienated by this extremism, he suggested, and the resulting backlash would obliterate all of the tangible gains made by Irish Catholics since the bitter era of sectarian warfare in the 1850s.<sup>39</sup> The situation was particularly embarrassing for the Catholic Church since Lynch's presence alongside Murphy on the podium on both occasions gave rise to allegations that the clergy sanctioned these treasonous sentiments. As rumours of a Fenian invasion mounted, Bishop Lynch came under increasing pressure to denounce the Hibernians and he

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37. *Irish Canadian*, 7 January 1863.

38. *Irish Canadian*, 18 March, 25 March 1863 and 23 March 1864; *Canadian Freeman*, 19 March 1863, 24 March and 31 March 1864; *Leader*, 18 March 1864.

39. *Canadian Freeman*, 31 March, 14 April and 21 April 1864.

finally bowed to internal and external pressure. In August of 1865, he condemned the Hibernians and called on all Catholics to quit the organization since they had "fallen away from Catholic principles".<sup>40</sup>

Once again, a struggle for leadership and control of the Irish community was apparent, but the internal alliances had shifted since the early 1860s. Now the clergy were supported by the middle-class elite, as moderate Irish Catholics sought to rein in a working-class organization whose radicalism threatened their interests. This clash, essentially one between strategies of protest and accommodation, came to a head in March 1866 amid rumours that the long-anticipated Fenian invasion was to coincide with a huge St. Patrick's Day parade organized by the Hibernians.<sup>41</sup> As tension within the city mounted in the preceding weeks, Irish moderates sought to distance themselves from the Hibernians to reassure the Protestant majority that the latter's extremism was not shared by all. Having supported and even encouraged the extremists, Bishop Lynch found himself at the centre of the storm, as moderates appealed to him to control the Hibernians. "Everything depends on Your Lordship", D'Arcy McGee warned the Bishop, and he insisted that the future of the entire Irish Catholic community in Canada was at stake: "The position of our Church and race in Canada for the next 25 years, will be determined by the stand taken, during these next six weeks."<sup>42</sup>

In this situation, Lynch clearly had no choice but to ban the parade, which he did shortly thereafter by advising all Catholics to spend the day either in Church or at home. By this point, however, the Hibernians had moved beyond the control of the clergy. Having foregone the procession at the Bishop's insistence the previous year, they were less amenable on this occasion, and insisted on their right to take to the streets regardless of the consequences. Clearly, the Hibernians were determined to push the strategy of protest and their strident assertion of ethnic persistence to its extreme. But they had by now left the bulk of Irish Catholics behind in this respect. While a great many supported their call for Irish liberation and fervently resented the domestic prejudice which the Hibernians sought to counter, very few were willing to provoke the wrath of the host society or flout the authority of their bishop to express these sentiments. Thus, only the die-hard Hibernians turned out to march in the smallest parade in years, and the anti-climax was completed by the failure of the Fenian invasion to materialize.<sup>43</sup>

This caution was even more forcibly demonstrated when the Fenian raids finally occurred in June of 1866. For despite a widespread expression of sullen resentment, an overwhelming majority of Irish Canadians were induced

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40. A.A.T., Archbishop Lynch Papers, Bishop Lynch to Bishop Farrell, 12 August 1865; *Canadian Freeman*, 17 August 1865.

41. *Globe*, 9 March 1866.

42. A.A.T., Archbishop Lynch Papers, T.D. McGee to Bishop Lynch, 7 March 1866.

43. *Globe*, 18 March 1866; *Irish Canadian*, 21 March 1866.

to hold themselves aloof from the Irish American 'liberators' by a combination of clerical and lay pressure, instincts of self-preservation and the desire for acceptance in their new homeland.<sup>44</sup> The Fenian raids, nevertheless, cast a shadow of suspicion over the entire Irish community in Canada. The inevitable Protestant backlash produced what one individual described as a "reign of terror", confirming McGee's dire predictions of the consequences of flirting with treason.<sup>45</sup> In this hostile climate, Catholics naturally reverted to a low profile and there was no suggestion of holding a public celebration on St. Patrick's Day 1867.

Once boisterous and triumphant, the Hibernians found their influence and prestige within the Toronto Irish community greatly undermined, and the round-up of suspected Fenian sympathizers further decimated the radical leadership. Control of the organization now reverted to relative moderates, such as Patrick Boyle, editor of the *Irish Canadian*; and while he followed Murphy's old lead in some respects, marked changes soon became apparent. Nationalism had proven its effectiveness as a vehicle for mobilizing the ethnic consciousness of Irish Catholic immigrants and focussing their resentment against the marginalization they experienced in their new home. But unlike the American situation, where republican nationalism placed Irish immigrants within the ideological mainstream, in Canada these sentiments clearly isolated them from the larger British population.<sup>46</sup> As well as separating the Irish from their neighbours, it also had the effect of alienating Catholics from their Church, which was the only institution in Canada the Irish could claim as their own. To rehabilitate themselves, therefore, nationalist leaders had to reforge the link between nationalism and Catholicism; develop a variation of nationalism which integrated rather than isolated Irish Catholics from Canadian society; and make their message more relevant by addressing the material needs of Irish Catholic immigrants in Toronto and Ontario. As with many other shifts within the Irish community, these developments would be reflected in the way St. Patrick's Day was celebrated.

After the Fenian fiasco, the Hibernians reverted to their former deference towards the Catholic Church and the first public sign of this rapprochement came in 1868 when Bishop Lynch approved a resumption of the St. Patrick's Day parades. Although four hundred Hibernians turned out to lead the procession, both the attendance and the tone were far cries from the massive demonstrations of the early 1860s. A subdued atmosphere pervaded the celebrations and this was clearly reflected in the speech delivered by Patrick

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44. W.S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 50-80.

45. National Archives of Canada, J.L.P. O'Hanley Papers, Vol. 1, J.L.P. O'Hanley to J. Hearn, 4 May 1868.

46. For the role of Irish nationalism in the integration of Irish immigrants into American society, see T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (New York: J.P. Lippincott, 1966).

Boyle which focussed on the plight of Fenian prisoners in Canadian jails, but avoided more contentious issues.<sup>47</sup> This uncharacteristic moderation of the Hibernians stood in sharp contrast to the obsession which the nationalist press began to exhibit in provincial and federal politics. Obviously a more practical and effective means of improving the position of the Irish than the Utopian promises of the Fenians, this new focus also facilitated a growing cordiality between nationalists and members of the middle class who were determined to transform Irish Catholics into an influential political pressure group in Ontario.<sup>48</sup> The politicization of Irish nationalism received public expression on St. Patrick's Day 1869 when John O'Donohoe, a former member of the Toronto corporation and veteran political activist, was invited to deliver the key-note speech to the procession from the steps of St. Michael's Cathedral.<sup>49</sup> Although he paid lip-service to the traditional nationalist shibboleths, O'Donohoe focussed primarily on the political situation and the social inferiority suffered by Irish Catholics because of their lack of political influence. In the Legislature of Ontario, he lamented, "we find our body as completely excluded as if we formed no portion of the body politic", and he insisted that the only means of improving their standing within the province was by putting aside their internal differences and demanding their rightful share of power and the spoils of office: "Let us practice unanimity and in cordial co-operation form a united phalanx, determined to live in harmony with all men — but determined for our right."<sup>50</sup>

A consensus clearly existed within the Irish community concerning its subordinate status in Ontario and on the efficacy of political activity as a means of overcoming it. With the new moderation of the nationalists paving the way for closer co-operation with the clergy and the lay elite, all were soon working together within the Catholic League, a political pressure group established in 1870 to forward the political interests of the province's Catholics.<sup>51</sup> The League soon became the focus of Irish organizational activities and this new concern with politics was reflected in the prominence which these matters received in subsequent St. Patrick's Day celebrations. Long an occasion for reaffirming religious or nationalist solidarity, the parades in the early 1870s also became a vehicle for disseminating political propaganda — indicating once again the flexibility of Irish immigrants to adapt traditional cultural practices to the needs of a new environment.<sup>52</sup>

47. *Leader*, 18 March 1868 and *Irish Canadian*, 18 March 1868.

48. M. Cottrell, "Irish Catholic Political Leadership in Toronto, 1855-1882: A Study of Ethnic Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 1988), 225-312.

49. For O'Donohoe's career, see M. Cottrell, "John O'Donohoe and the Politics of Ethnicity in Ontario", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Papers*, forthcoming.

50. *Irish Canadian*, 24 March 1869.

51. M. Cottrell, "Irish Political Leadership", 225-312.

52. *Irish Canadian*, 23 March 1870, 20 March 1872, 19 March 1873 and 22 March 1876; *Canadian Freeman*, 23 March 1871.

This concern with politics reflected a very important change in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, a change which manifested a wider shift within the Irish Catholic community in Toronto. Rather than emphasizing religious or ethnic exclusivity and separatism as had been the practice in the past, both the sermons and the outdoor speeches now focussed on the need to carve out for Irish Catholics an acceptable place in Ontario society.<sup>53</sup> These new integrationist tendencies may be seen as by-products of the growing adjustment of Irish immigrants to Ontario and the increasing acceptance and respect which they were receiving from the host society.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the success of the Catholic League in attracting attention to Irish grievances and securing the election of an increasing number of Irish candidates suggested that they were gradually coming to wield the power and influence they felt they deserved within the political structures of their adopted home.<sup>55</sup>

By the mid-1870s, therefore, the collective fortunes of Irish Catholics in Toronto had improved considerably, and these changes were reflected in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day. While it was still felt necessary to advertise their presence and distinctiveness by taking to the streets on the feast of their patron saint, the event differed radically from the boisterous nationalist demonstrations of the early 1860s. The Hibernians were still present, but they attracted nowhere near the numbers they previously commanded. Their once splendid banners were now dilapidated and the speeches in support of Home Rule and constitutional solutions to the Irish problem, while compatible with their presence in a self-governing colony, were a far cry from Michael Murphy's fiery harangues of an earlier time.<sup>56</sup> Increasingly anachronistic, the Hibernians no longer exercised a stranglehold over the celebrations and they were forced to share the podium with organizations such as the Father Matthew Temperance Society, the Emerald Benevolent Association and the Sons of St. Patrick.<sup>57</sup> The values which the latter sought to impress both on their audience and on the host society — sobriety, temperance, self-help and thrift — in short mid-Victorian respectability — represented the new collective identity of the Irish Catholic community.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the primary function of St. Patrick's Day celebrations now seemed to be to put lingering stereotypes to rest by demonstrating that Irish Catholics were worthy of full citizenship and total acceptance from a host society that had once expressed reservations about their fitness.<sup>59</sup>

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53. *Irish Canadian*, 22 March 1871 and 18 March 1874.

54. M. McGowan, "We Endure What We Cannot Cure: J.J. Lynch and Roman Catholic-Protestant Relations in Toronto, 1864-75. Frustrated Attempts at Peaceful Co-Existence", *Canadian Society of Church History Papers*, Vol. XV (1984), 16-17.

55. M. Cottrell, "Irish Political Leadership", 313-454; D. Swainson, "James O'Reilly and Catholic Politics", *Historic Kingston*, Vol. XXI (1973), 11-21.

56. *Irish Canadian*, 20 March 1872 and 18 March 1874.

57. *Ibid.*, 22 March 1876.

58. Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations", 433-438.

59. *Irish Canadian*, 22 March 1876 and 21 March 1877.

Distance and time were gradually weakening the attachment of Irish immigrants to the Old Country and militant nationalism was giving way to nostalgic sentimentality. Increasingly prosperous and secure both economically and socially, and with a new generation growing up for whom Ireland had very little relevance, Irish Torontonians were in fact becoming Canadianized.<sup>60</sup> On a personal level, it was no longer necessary to rely on the ethnic support group for survival, and collective self-respect no longer depended upon a constant assertion of distinctiveness. Their efforts, instead, were directed towards downplaying the differences between themselves and their neighbours and, in this, the St. Patrick's Day celebration was an obstacle rather than an asset. Commenting on the extremely poor turnout at the 1876 parade, Patrick Boyle suggested that the time had come to re-evaluate the annual celebrations. These demonstrations perpetuated the isolation of Irish Catholics, he concluded, for of all the ethnic groups in Canada, they alone insisted on "placing before the public their persons and sentiments in a more or less ridiculous drapery".<sup>61</sup> More important than the ridicule of their neighbours, however, was the fact that such displays were increasingly incompatible with their higher duty as citizens of Canada:

Their abandonment is demanded by many considerations of good citizenship. They serve to maintain in this land, to which we have all come for quiet rather than broil, the miserable dissension and violence of a past which the present generation has outlived and outgrown. As a duty to the concord of society, to peace and order, to industry and steadiness, to that perfect unity which proves strength to the State, those processions which are instances of bad citizenship in this country...ought to be abandoned.<sup>62</sup>

With even the remnants of radical nationalism losing interest, the future of the event was obviously in doubt, and it came as no surprise that 1877 saw the last public St. Patrick's Day celebration in Toronto for over a century.<sup>63</sup>

While it lasted, the event was the most visible demonstration of Irishness in the city and, as such, provided an important continuity between the Old World and the New for Irish immigrants. The parades, however, can only be understood in the context of the needs of the Irish Catholic community in their new environment. The unfurling of the green banners on St. Patrick's Day asserted the Irish Catholic right to the streets and constituted both a "ritualized demand for recognition and an affirmation of ethnic solidarity in a predominantly Protestant city".<sup>64</sup> The parades thus allowed Irish immigrants to define their collective identity, to advertise their distinctiveness and, in the

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60. For the transformation of Toronto's Irish Catholics into an English-speaking Canadian Catholic community, see M. McGowan, "We are All Canadians: A Social, Religious and Cultural Portrait of Toronto's English-Speaking Roman Catholics, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1988).

61. *Irish Canadian*, 5 April 1876.

62. *Ibid.*, 5 April 1876.

63. *Ibid.*, 20 March 1878.

64. Clarke, "Irish Voluntary Associations", 460.



process, to demand corporate recognition for their presence. The two decades after the Famine were crucial to the first of these goals, as Catholicism and nationalism were established as the parameters of Irish ethnicity and served as the focus of the celebrations until the 1870s. Resolving the appropriate response to the host society was much more contentious, however, as evidenced by the struggle for control of the celebrations by different elements within the Irish community. Protest and accommodation were ultimately the alternatives offered by those vying for ethnic leadership, and by the mid-1870s, the issue had been resolved in favour of the latter. Thus, nationalism was largely discarded because of its fundamental incompatibility with the prevailing English-Canadian ideology, and religion became the primary identity for a group who increasingly defined themselves as English-speaking Catholic Canadians.

The abandonment of the parades in the mid-1870s may therefore be seen as a crucial indice of Irish assimilation, but also points to an important relationship between ethnic persistence and structural integration. For as long as Irish Catholics found themselves outside the Canadian mainstream, elements within the group insisted on preserving and advertising their distinctiveness, especially on St. Patrick's Day. When the political and economic structures began to embrace them, and Irish Catholics were afforded the same social acceptance as other groups, however, the need for displaying such distinctiveness was no longer perceived to exist. Thus, public celebrations of St. Patrick's Day, which had once served the interests of Irish immigrants recently arrived in a strange environment, were abandoned when they became an impediment to the group's subsequent and natural desire to become Canadian.

