

Émile-Lapalme symposium, in May 1987, are to be commended for their efforts and diligence in getting this historic document into print.

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Brian C. Mitchell — *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821-1861*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Pp. xiii, 247.

This is a local case study at its most sensitive, using a full range of local sources to analyse a particular question, in this instance, the transformation of the Irish in a New England mill town from "a transient collection of unskilled workers" into "a permanent Irish working class" (3). The book is readable and the depth of research, a pleasant change from so many works which attempt to portray a community solely through the impersonality of census statistics. Lowell, as a leading Massachusetts textile town, has previously been used as a laboratory by historians, most notably by Thomas Dublin, who explored the lives of the New England farm-women who moved into mill-work there, in *Women at Work*. Mitchell focusses on the evolving relationship between the Irish and the masters of Lowell.

At first, no one intended the Irish to have a permanent place in the industrial utopia the Boston Associates created on the banks of the Merrimack River, in 1821. Itinerant labourers who had resided some years in America, some coming via Canada, the Irish came to Lowell at its foundation to construct its buildings and canals. They grouped in gangs, sought work at first through their foremen, and lived in shantytowns or "paddy camps" on unused corporation land near the works. Though their jobs were seasonal, their numbers grew and many brought their families in. When a Catholic church was built in 1831 with the encouragement of the company which hoped it would bring a measure of social order to the camps, competing Yankee labourers rioted, viewing the new structure as an unwelcome sign that these interlopers were there to stay.

A new "middle class" of Irish shopkeepers and craftsmen, only moderately better off than the labourers but less transient and, therefore, with a greater stake in the community, took root about 1830 and soon became intermediaries between their fellow countrymen and the town authorities. Largely non-citizens and split between two wards at opposite ends of town, the Irish were not active politically and depended on this "middle class" to articulate their interests. The shopkeepers were not able to prevent the company from selling off much of the squatter lands to speculators, but as supporters of the Catholic parish, they worked out a remarkable educational compromise in 1835 by which a public school was opened in the Irish district staffed by Catholic teachers approved by the priests.

However, the tenacious appeal of the old factions intruded upon the parish and divided even the middle class. Mitchell is at times ambiguous in dealing with this period. He admits a lack of detailed information on the schism in the church under Fr. McDermott, but seems unsure whether the end result was positive or negative. McDermott alienated parishioners by railing against the character of the Catholic teachers with such vehemence that he endangered the educational compromise and left the Yankees feeling less accommodating. On the plus side, his temperance society, and later the Irish Repeal movement, overcame some of the regional differences dividing his congregation. These Irish national movements were also viewed approvingly by the Americans, who saw in them echoes of their own republican ideals and concern for respectability. Nonetheless, Mitchell concludes that the Irish middle class was in disarray as economic conditions in Lowell declined.

By the 1840s, the town was falling behind newer textile centres and the Boston Associates attempted to maximize profits by abandoning the ideals with which they had founded the town. The Yankee farm-women living in the boarding houses were replaced in the mills by women and children

from the Irish districts. At the same time, changes in shipping routes brought increasing numbers of Irish to Lowell. They expanded into traditionally non-Irish areas and were joined, after 1845, by huge numbers of poor Famine emigrants. The Irish became "visible symbols of deteriorating standards" in the town (99).

Anti-Irish feeling culminated in the sweep to power of the nativist "Know Nothing" Party in the state and the local elections of 1854. The Irish responded to Yankee hostility by gathering more closely around their new priest, Fr. John O'Brien, a strong-minded administrator who strengthened the Catholic Church's institutional presence by establishing a convent and separate schools for girls, and building a huge gothic revival church symbolic of a new Irish Catholic identity. Irish Lowell continued to be an impoverished and highly transient community — in the 1850s, there was an 87 percent turnover — but this fluidity was countered by the strong Catholic institutional presence. Mitchell echoes Kerby Miller in noting that O'Brien's success was in part due to the "narrow, provincial, and...pessimistic" nature of Catholic philosophy, which promised less than had the old compromises, accepted persecution as part of man's earthly existence, and advocated social separatism. Yet, the Irish were also patriotic Americans in their own way and rallied to the colours, in 1861.

In common with many students of Irish Americans, Mitchell equates "Irish" with "Irish Catholic", and the reader could quite easily come away with the impression that there were no Irish Protestants in Lowell. However, they do turn up in the statistical tables at the rear (159), where Mitchell notes relief granted by the town to forty Irish Protestants and forty-four Irish Catholics, in 1859; and to twenty-three Protestants and forty Catholics, in 1860. This is the only place Irish Protestants are mentioned in the book, but the statistics themselves suggest that they accounted for a substantial proportion of the poor, and one wonders whether they might not have accounted for an even greater proportion of the shopkeeping middle class. Consideration of the relationships between Irish Protestants and Catholics and between the Protestants and the town's ruling elite are significant omissions. In noting that twenty-three of twenty-five Irish Protestant applications for relief were successful in 1860, whereas only forty of seventy-eight Irish Catholic applications were, Mitchell's table perhaps hints that the Protestants and Catholics may have been perceived and treated differently. Consequently, the reader is left wondering whether the Irish were a cause for concern to Lowell's American population because they were Irish, because they were Catholic, or because they were poor.

With this major exception, the story Mitchell tells in painstakingly researched and clearly presented. He works considerable pertinent detail into a reasonably short book (155 pages of text). I wish we could have seen a cartographer's name in the acknowledgements; the maps are terrible scribbles that detract from an otherwise fine volume.

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Lois G. Schwoerer — *Lady Rachel Russell "One of the Best of Women"*: Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Pp. xxviii, 321.

Biography is a difficult historical form. On the one hand, there is the need to remain true to one's subject, to tell the story of a life in all its uniqueness and historical setting. On the other hand is the equally pressing need to make sense of that life, to situate it within a context of understanding and to see how it conforms to the patterns of other contemporary lives. For what can biography tell us that is worth knowing? Beyond the sense of playing God, of encompassing a person's life within one's brain, from beginning to end, what is the historical value of such an exercise? These are some of the reflections raised by reading Lois G. Schwoerer's *Lady Rachel Russell "One of the Best of Women"*.