

1973

## The Irish In Lewiston, Maine: A Search for Security On The Urban Frontier, 1850-1880

Margaret J. Buker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Buker, Margaret J.. "The Irish In Lewiston, Maine: A Search for Security On The Urban Frontier, 1850-1880." *Maine History* 13, 1 (1973): 5-25. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol13/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

THE IRISH IN LEWISTON, MAINE: A  
SEARCH FOR SECURITY ON THE URBAN  
FRONTIER, 1850-1880

By

Margaret J. Buker

Americans have long subscribed to the belief that the United States is the land of opportunity for the common man – whether he be native or foreign born. No other nation has celebrated the notion of social mobility to the same degree. The idea of an open and fluid social order has been a national obsession for more than a century, but how has the faith in mobility squared with reality? A considerable body of historical literature on this subject has accumulated in the years since 1964 when Stephan Thernstrom published his major work – *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*. His work on mobility among unskilled and predominantly Irish laborers in Newburyport, Massachusetts, has spurred interest in studying mobility among ethnic groups in other cities.

Little of this sort of investigation has been carried out on Maine communities. The tendency to regard Maine as an essentially rural state and to disregard its small number of cities may be one reason for this neglect. There has been, perhaps, insufficient encouragement to study Maine's urban history. Yet, while interest may be lacking, objects of interest are not. Lewiston is but one of several Maine cities where such investigation may prove quite fruitful.

into New England of large numbers of Irish. The general economic dislocation of the Irish agricultural economy, aggravated in the 1840's by the appearance of the potato blight, drove many Irish off the land. Unable to pay their rents, and anxious to escape starvation and misery, the evicted peasants had but one desire – to escape Ireland and English rule as quickly as possible. They came to America out of desperation and often with little hope that the future offered a better life.<sup>5</sup>

The cost of transportation, even with the relatively low trans-oceanic rates, involved for the majority of the Irish the expenditure of their last resources. In Boston or New York the penniless newcomer arrived with no alternative but to remain where he was until work could be found. Desperation drove them to accept any type of employment which was offered. The less fortunate, who lacked sufficient funds for passage to Boston or New York, were forced to go to Quebec, Nova Scotia, or New Brunswick in the empty holds of returning timber ships. From the Maritime provinces, they wandered down the coast, drifting about until they reached a city where work could be found or a community whose charitable institutions would shelter them.<sup>6</sup>

The Irish who eventually settled in Lewiston had followed both routes. The manuscript census schedules reveal many instances of children born in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, indicating that these Canadian provinces had been the point of debarkation for a large number of Irish families. An equally large number had lived in Massachusetts for several years before securing employment in Lewiston. From whatever geographic source, the majority arrived in the community with little, if any, accumulated savings and often without the types of skills which would have assured them of economic security.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Lewiston was a very dynamic community during the following decades. Unlike the major Massachusetts textile cities, Lewiston did not begin its period of industrial take-off until after 1850. From an agricultural community of 3,600 in 1850, Lewiston grew into an industrial city of over 19,000 by 1880. In addition to the striking increase in population, the city experienced a radical alteration in its occupational and social structure. The manuscript census schedules for 1850 and subsequent census years provide valuable information on mobility in this critical period of early growth. The selection of Lewiston as a subject of study allows us to view the process of mobility in an essentially “frontier” urban environment. The very fact of urban growth generated a proliferation of employment opportunities. The textile corporations, opened in the 1850’s, provided large numbers of both skilled, and semi-skilled positions; the constant demand for home and business construction furnished opportunities for both unskilled work and employment in the construction trades; the expanding population of the city created demands for social services — professionals, and large and small businesses. One of the major objects of this study is to determine the extent to which Irish immigrants were able to take advantage of the opportunities which economic expansion generated.

At the outset, the Irish held commanding control of the lowest rungs of Lewiston’s occupational ladder. In 1850, nearly 75 percent of all the unskilled laborers in the town was Irish. Yet more significantly, unskilled labor represented nearly 95 percent of all employment available to Irish males in the community. Only a small number held skilled jobs; in 1850 Lewiston’s Irish community included one contractor, one teacher, and one grocer.<sup>8</sup>

The manuscript census schedules for the succeeding decades reveal the occupational distribution of the Irish

population at ten year intervals, and gradual but modest improvement is reflected in the statistical information. The percentage of Irishmen confined to unskilled work gradually declined over the years, although it never fell much below 40 percent and averaged over 60 percent for the thirty year period for which information is available.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of those who held skilled jobs or who established themselves as businessmen in the community did not emerge from the unskilled labor class, but rather moved into the community with savings and experience which enabled them to take advantage of the dynamic economic climate in Lewiston. The group which is of major interest are those who started out in the town as unskilled day laborers. They represented the major portion of the Irish population of Lewiston. What, if any, were the opportunities available to them? In order to understand the tenuous position of the day laborer, we must first make clear certain characteristics of unskilled work:

1) Day labor was generally the lowest paying work available. The rates for unskilled labor varied between a dollar a day and \$1.25 a day over the thirty year period under study. Those who worked for the city on road or sewer construction and maintenance were generally paid one dollar per day. The rates which the textile corporations paid for common labor varied from year to year but averaged only a little over one dollar per day.<sup>10</sup>

2) Day labor was irregular employment. The digging of ditches, grading of streets, and other tasks did not provide continuous employment. Individuals might be employed one day and unemployed the next. The work was generally outdoor employment which could be, and usually was, halted by bad weather. The work was seasonal and there was a frequent shortage of employment during the winter months. At most, the day laborer could expect to be

employed for 240 days out of the year.<sup>11</sup>

3) The type of work done by the laborer was generally physically taxing, occasionally exposing the individual to crippling or fatal accidents.

4) As the laborer advanced in age his economic position could be expected to deteriorate. The older man simply could not compete physically with the younger job-seeker. Consequently, the Irish laborer was faced with the specter of misery in his retirement, not infrequently becoming a public charge when there was no family to support him.

These factors combined to make such work the least desirable employment available. Consequently, not until the French Canadian immigration of the 1870's was Irish dominance of the unskilled labor pool challenged.<sup>12</sup>

If at all possible, the Irish laborer desired to move into a more secure and better paying economic position. Those who had experience or skills in the various construction trades were often able to find work as brick or stone masons or carpenters. The booming construction industry offered many opportunities. Yet the majority of Irishmen lacked experience in this activity and were not in a position to learn a new trade.

A larger number of laborers were able to move into semi-skilled factory employment. Jobs in the textile mills paid somewhat better than day labor, but even more important than the slight improvement in daily wages was the fact that mill employment was a year-round occupation and was not beset with the uncertainties which plagued unskilled labor. A large number of Irishmen were employed by the Lewiston Bleachery and Dye Works, perhaps because the work was considered somewhat undesirable by native-born job-seekers. The Irish also had a firm hold on jobs in the Gas Works, probably because, here again, the job was considered undesirable by potential competitors.<sup>13</sup>

The number of successes among the Irish laborers was small, but enough to encourage some optimism about the possibilities open to the Irish immigrant. Several Irish laborers were able to accumulate sufficient savings to purchase their own farms. One man – Timothy Callahan – became a prominent businessman despite his humble beginnings. He was able to build his grocery business into an investment worth nearly \$20,000. Thomas Ward had a very successful clothing business in the 1870's and served repeatedly as a city councilman.<sup>14</sup>

Among the Irish laborers in the city, however, the most striking success was Patrick Many. Sometime in the 1850's he moved from an unskilled position to become a truckman. By 1860 he had accumulated assets of \$3,000. Over the course of the next fifteen years he emerged as one of the city's leading contractors. He supervised railroad work, did private contracting for home and business construction, built several tenements which he rented, and on occasion worked for the city. He was the owner and proprietor of the Androscoggin Trotting Park, the city's only race track. By the mid-1870's his property was valued by the local tax assessors at over \$25,000.<sup>15</sup>

The great majority of Irish laborers, however, were occupationally immobile. Even after thirty years in the city, over 60 percent of foreign-born laborers were still holding unskilled positions. Some were able to accumulate sizeable property holdings, but most had only a tenuous security in either occupation or residence. Yet, the geographic mobility of this group after the initial decade was surprisingly low. While Thernstrom found that in Newburyport, Massachusetts, forces were at work winnowing out the less successful, no such mechanism appears to have been operative in Lewiston. Certainly, Lewiston's distance from other major cities which might

have siphoned off population was one factor. Yet a far more significant factor and one which Thernstrom and others have failed to give much attention to was the availability of public charity support in times of economic distress.<sup>16</sup>

The laborer who could turn to the community for relief during periods of hardship was much more likely to remain where he was than to venture elsewhere in search of uncertain employment. The connection between residential permanency and welfare availability seems unquestionable. Where public support was available, an individual was unlikely to uproot his family without fairly good assurances that their security would be enhanced by moving. For many laborers in Newburyport there had been little choice. Newburyport's charitable assistance was, Thernstrom tells us, "penurious in the extreme." The prospects for foreign-born laborers were made even less attractive in the mid-1850's by the passage of a state law in Massachusetts forbidding relief to alien paupers except in a few grim, State almshouses. The harshness of relief prospects, coupled with the declining employment opportunities, were undoubtedly factors encouraging many laborers to leave.<sup>17</sup>

The situation in Lewiston was significantly different. There was no state law relieving the community of the responsibility for the relief of immigrants. Nor were there other communities on whom Lewiston could shift the burden of support. While laborers coming into the city from rural communities in Maine could be returned to their place of origin in cases of indigency, Irish laborers who were Lewiston residents or who had no other settlement within the state automatically became Lewiston's responsibility.

From the early 1850's through 1880, the general attitude as evidenced by the reports of the overseers of the poor

and other public officials was one of support and concern. A tightening up of public relief in the early 1860's – a reaction against the lax and over-generous attitude of the late 1850's – tended to be fairly short-lived. By 1868, Mayor Isaac Parker was saying of the overseers of the poor: “They should be men who combine business qualifications with Christian virtues – men of discrimination and large humanity – men, who, while they would consult economy, if they erred at all would err on the side of humanity, and bestow too much rather than too little, – men who would always remember that they have a humane and Christian, as well as a legal duty to perform toward the unfortunate poor.”<sup>18</sup> In that year there were thirty-seven Irish families receiving aid, by far the largest number of any nationality. The overseers were not particularly upset by this fact, and attributed it to the “more liberal *private* charities of other nationalities.”<sup>19</sup>

The employment situation became even bleaker in the 1870's with the onset of an extended economic depression. The large influx of French Canadians anxious for work, coupled with the fact that Irish laborers who had entered the city in the early 1850's were by now advanced in age and often unable to work, regularly increased the welfare burdens. Yet there was little evidence that public officials felt that the individuals out of work were completely responsible for their condition. In 1871, Mayor Garcelon admonished that “the large influx of non-residents seeking employment in our manufactories, will always be a source of expense to the city . . . The poor we have always with us, and not only justice but humanity requires prompt and efficient protection. Let us remember that there are none so wealthy or exalted but they may become the objects of public support, and that the measure we mete unto others may in like measure be meted unto us.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to direct charitable relief, the city assisted many by providing work on the city streets, sewers, and other public works. Mayor Farwell in his 1873 address suggested that the city provide “those destitute and temporarily out of employment with some occupation upon the city works or otherwise.” The benefits of such a policy, he argued, would be twofold. Those helped would have an opportunity to earn their own support and thus feel less like dependents on the city’s bounty. At the same time the expenses of the city would be reduced.<sup>21</sup> By 1880 all street work was being done by the day, under a city regulation which required that this work be given only to Lewiston residents. This regulation gave an advantage to Irish laborers over newly arrived immigrants who had no established residence in the community, and the passage of such a restriction reflects the growing political influence of the Irish.

The conclusions of this analysis of occupational mobility are sobering. Although the overall occupational picture indicated steady improvement and intensive study of the careers of individual laborers reveals a large number of modest advances and a small number of major successes, the majority of the city’s Irish laborers were occupationally immobile, confined to the lowest paying and least secure jobs, and able to survive economically only by reliance on the employment of their children and frequent recourse to public support in periods of ill-health or unemployment.

If nineteenth century Americans were optimistic about the immigrant laborer’s chances for upward mobility, they were even more optimistic about his children’s prospects for success. Was this optimism warranted? From a young age – often nine or ten – Irish children were put to work in Lewiston’s textile mills. The report of the overseers of the poor in 1872 expressed considerable skepticism

concerning the preparation which these children were receiving for self-supporting adult life. "There are, in our city," they reported, "at least five hundred male and female minor children, that are growing up with very little education, and a great many without any at all; with no knowledge of labor, except that furnished by our mills, the result of which will be to increase the number of paupers to an alarming extent, just so fast as they go out into the world on their own account."<sup>22</sup>

The reports and pronouncements of public officials throughout the 1860's and 1870's were full of concern about the lack of preparation which the children of the poor were receiving. One major problem was the failure of the city to build sufficient school facilities to meet the ever-rising demand. As early as 1868 the School Committee had expressed serious alarm at the inadequacy of the facilities to meet the needs. The overcrowding of classrooms was most acute in the working class districts, where population growth was most intense, and where Irish and later French Canadian families were most highly concentrated. Five primary schools on Lincoln street were crowded to overflowing the School Committee reported, for all of these scholars had been rejected for want of room, and from the school near the Gas Works – a strongly Irish residential area – twenty-five scholars were taken out at one time and sent into the streets to give room for the remainder to turn around. The conclusions of the Board were unequivocal:

It is now a question as to whether we shall provide our children, particularly those of the lower grades, with the means to prepare themselves for the duties of life, or drive them into the streets where they may fit themselves for lives of idleness and, perhaps, crime. We may postpone other improvements and not materially suffer; but to postpone the construction of needed schoolrooms may forever put

beyond our control hundreds of children, soon to become strong men and women and take upon themselves responsibilities as citizens.<sup>23</sup>

It became increasingly obvious, however, that the lack of sufficient classroom facilities was not the only factor involved in the alarmingly low rates of school attendance by lower class children. One of the most penetrating criticisms of the educational system's inability to meet the needs of laboring children was offered by Dr. Alonzo Garcelon in his address as mayor in 1871:

We have a law upon our statute books requiring the attendance of every scholar under the age of fifteen years employed in our mills, for at least three months in every year. This law, though of vital importance, is a dead letter practically . . . . Enforced though it might and ought to be, to its full extent, I presume there would be hundreds of instances which demand especial consideration . . . . We must bear in mind that by far the larger proportion of these scholars are children of the poor, and that their labor in the mills, or elsewhere, is absolutely essential to keep the wolf from the door, — that without that labor starvation or the poor-house would be the fate of many a family.<sup>24</sup>

The educational system, as it existed, was aimed at the preparation of middle class children for adult life. One of Mayor Garcelon's major criticisms was that the system of graded schools discriminated against the poor, since they could attend only a small part of each year. Consequently, they became lost in the educational system, seldom meeting the requirements for advancement to higher grades, and often totally neglected. In a statement which is, perhaps, the clearest critique both of the inapplicability of the school system to this class of students and of the whole mobility thesis, Mayor Garcelon admonished: "It is idle to throw open gilded parlors and to expose to gaze tables covered with the choicest delicacies, and invite to the banquet those who are bound by the inexorable thongs of

fate to a position from which they cannot extricate themselves.”<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Garcelon further argued that “unless we would have growing up in our midst a class almost entirely devoid of the rudiments of education, vicious as well as ignorant, we must have especial provision for their accommodation.”<sup>26</sup>

He suggested that schools be set up where these children could learn the basic educational tools and that, in addition, the city promote some type of vocational education where working class children could learn useful and marketable skills. These suggestions were not acted upon. The city did not have the money or interest in making special provisions for the education of the poor. For the most part, Irish children were exposed to formal education for only a few years, if at all, and then picked up what further training they required in the city’s textile mills or elsewhere.

In spite of the pessimism expressed by some of the city’s leading political figures, the situation was not as dismal as it might at first seem. While those occupations which required educational training – professions and a variety of white collar positions – were effectively closed to all but a very small minority of Irish children, their economic position tended to be more secure than their father’s. Unskilled day labor, which had furnished employment for the majority of Irish immigrants, accounted for only about 20 percent of the occupational distribution of the second generation. The majority, quite understandably, moved into semi-skilled factory employment. The cotton textile mills had furnished for most Irish children their earliest working experience. Some individuals were able to move upward within the factory hierarchy to lower management positions. A larger number held skilled jobs as spinners, dyers, or section hands. The majority, however, were listed in the census schedules and city directories as simply

factory operatives. The sons of Irish laborers also had greater access to skilled construction jobs. A fairly large number became brick masons or carpenters. Many of them undoubtedly served the construction demands within the Irish community.<sup>27</sup>

While the economic position of the second generation hardly warrants excessive optimism, their occupational improvement was significant. Increased security and higher pay meant that a greater proportion of second generation families were able to survive economically without the necessity of relying upon the employment of their children. The third generation was, therefore, in a position to avail itself of the types of educational training which would prepare them for more desirable and lucrative employment.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the security of regular and remunerative employment, the Irish immigrant also sought residential security in the city. For some this involved the purchase or construction of their own home. For those forced to rent, residential security meant being able to afford healthy and sanitary accommodations for their families. The degree of success in meeting this objective varied considerably.

Home ownership represented both an avenue of upward social mobility – into the property-holding class – and an insurance against the vicissitudes of urban life. The Irish experience with eviction from their homes caused them to place an extremely high priority on property accumulation and home ownership. Many Irish families were willing to make great sacrifices – including the education of their children – in order to accumulate sufficient savings to purchase a city lot and construct a home.

The earliest Irish immigrants who had come to Lewiston to work on the canal system found themselves in a community which did not have any available housing facilities for them. Brick boarding houses were built in the

early 1850's by the textile corporations to accommodate Yankee girls who were recruited to work in the mills. No accommodations were ever planned to meet the housing needs of Irish families. The Irish response was to build temporary dwellings on land owned by the Lewiston Water Power Company. There were several areas in the city, known as "patches," where the Irish population lived, thickly settled in small wooden cottages, some of them only one room houses and others banked up with earth on the sides.<sup>29</sup>

Such housing facilities, meagerly furnished, offered inexpensive accommodation. However, excessive crowding of dwellings and unsanitary and unclean surroundings made them a potentially very serious health hazard. In the summer of 1854, the worst fears were realized when an epidemic of Asiatic cholera made its appearance in Lewiston. The dreadful pestilence, although it did not originate in the Irish community, got into Shingle Patch — one of the largest of the Irish settlements. As a health precaution and to prevent the spread of the disease, the selectmen ordered the dwellers on Shingle Patch to pull down their houses and move them into the country below the village. The other "patches" were less hard hit. Extensive efforts were made in those areas to clean up the buildings and surroundings. Although it lasted but a few weeks, the epidemic killed over 200 persons, the majority of them Irish. Sympathy was aroused for the plight of the stricken Irish families and the epidemic may well have helped to defuse anti-Irish feelings which in other communities raged so virulently at that time.<sup>30</sup>

The undesirable nature of their accommodations, added to the strong desire for property ownership, encouraged those Irish laborers who could to make efforts to purchase or construct their own homes. Numerous factors, however,

militated against their success. The relatively low pay and irregular employment of many Irish immigrants prevented them from accumulating the necessary financial reserve to purchase land and construct a home. Even with the employment of several children, many families were barely able to supply their basic needs. Another factor which worked against the Irish was the relatively high cost of city lots. The dynamic nature of Lewiston's economy and the dramatic increase in population created a booming real estate market. The demand for city lots drove up the price. The most fortunate Irishmen were those who were able to make real estate purchases in the 1850's when 50 x 100 foot lots on some streets could be purchased for \$200. By the mid-1860's, comparable lots could not be secured for less than \$500 to \$800.<sup>31</sup>

The manuscript census schedules for the 1850 through 1870 period indicate the value of real and personal property owned by the respondent. The process of property accumulation was extremely slow and the majority of Irish immigrants were never able to become home-owners. Those who did, however, often reported sizeable property holdings – generally in excess of \$1,000. However, the census does not reveal the extent to which this property was mortgaged. The records of the Androscoggin Registry of Deeds reveal not only the amount of money involved in the various real estate transfers, but also whether the property was mortgaged and the terms for mortgage repayment. It was the rare Irishman who could purchase property without resort to a mortgage whether provided by a local bank or an individual. The process of meeting the financial obligations on the first mortgage often required the taking out of a second mortgage.<sup>32</sup>

The size of the property holdings of many Irishmen and information gathered from newspapers and other sources

indicates that many of the Irish who owned property built tenement houses which not only served the owner's family but furnished, through rents, a second source of income. Income from rents often provided sufficient funds to meet the mortgage and other financial obligations on the property. There was a great demand for housing and rents tended to be rather high. This encouraged those who could to participate in this lucrative real estate market. In addition, Irish families who were forced to rent preferred, when possible, to rent from individuals whom they knew and trusted.

The quality of the tenement buildings was often sub-standard and the working class and Irish residential areas suffered from inadequate sewage and sanitary facilities. In the early decades of urban growth, the city was without an adequate sewer system. Efforts were made in the late 1860's to overcome the inadequacies. However, the City Physician reported in 1871 that "notwithstanding [what] the city has done during the year by the construction of sewers, cleaning of streets, etc., for the sanitary improvements of the place, there yet remains much to be done . . . I cannot avoid the conclusion that very much of the sickness of the city, especially among the Irish and French population, is caused by the overcrowding of tenements, with the consequent impure atmosphere within doors, and by poisonous gases from decaying vegetable and animal matter about the dwellings."<sup>33</sup>

The situation tended to deteriorate, rather than improve, over the succeeding years as the growing population and the influx of large numbers of French Canadians put increased pressure on already inadequate tenement facilities. In 1877 the City Physician reported in his annual review that:

In some parts of the city, tenement houses are greatly overcrowded,

so much so in our opinion as to constitute a prolific source of disease. In such localities especially, not only are the dwellings crowded and filthy, but the cellars and yards are, in many places, strewn with decaying organic matter, which not only offends the senses, but poisons the system and results in disease. In several instances families are living in apartments almost entirely below the level of the ground, the walls of whose rooms are seldom dry and the atmosphere always polluted with odors of mould and mildew. Such abodes may possibly afford health to some of the lower forms of animal life, but cannot aid the physical and moral advancement of a community.<sup>34</sup>

The historian surveying the residential position of the Irish immigrant might well be drawn to that small, but impressive, number who were able to make large gains – the individuals like Patrick Marshall, a common laborer who experienced no occupational mobility during the thirty year period of this study, yet who was able to amass property holdings valued in excess of \$7,000. His experience was repeated by others, yet the vast majority of Lewiston's Irish population failed to share in this success. The high cost of real estate and the inability of most families to accumulate sufficient savings for the purchase or construction of their own home meant that the majority were forced to rent. Throughout the period of this study, the Irish tended to be residentially segregated in certain areas of the city – Irish Patch, Gas House Patch, Burnt Woods. Their homes were crowded and the lack of adequate sanitary facilities or clean water encouraged the spread of disease.<sup>35</sup>

Progress was not entirely lacking. As the Irishman's economic position improved, so also did his ability to afford healthy and comfortable housing facilities. Home ownership was not beyond the reach of the more enterprising. The process of saving the necessary money involved many sacrifices, but the Irishman was rewarded both in terms of the investment value of his property and

of the security which home ownership afforded to the immigrant family.

Occupational and residential security represented the two major forces in the immigrant's adjustment to the community. Full integration into community life and social acceptance involved much more. Occupation and property holdings are relatively easy to determine; however, the various factors involved in social acceptance are impossible to quantify. Social adjustment and acceptance implies overcoming prejudices and reducing anxiety and conflict.

Lewiston never experienced the kinds of anti-Irish conflict which wracked other New England cities. Violent anti-Irish activity was an extremely rare occurrence in Lewiston. Perhaps, the dynamic nature of the city's economy and the lack of a sizeable lower class of native born laborers who might have felt threatened by the Irish immigrant acted to reduce the types of tension which in other communities flared into violence. While overt acts of violence against the Irish were not a serious concern, there was a considerable feeling of anxiety and alarm about many aspects of Irish life.<sup>36</sup>

Prominent among the features which concerned many Lewiston residents was the Irishman's excessive fondness for alcoholic beverages and the frequency with which Irishmen were engaged in criminal activity while under the influence of liquor. The newspapers seemingly never tired of recounting the regular police raids into the Irish settlements in search of prohibited beverages or the frequent cases of fights or wife beating which often accompanied intoxication. Excessive consumption of alcohol was also viewed as a contributing factor in increasing the city's welfare burdens.

Throughout the thirty year period from 1850 to 1880, there was a gradual development of a community of

interest between the Irish immigrant and the city at large. The Irish came to feel that they belonged in the community and that they had a future there. The growth of religious and fraternal organizations not only helped to tie the Irish community together, but also to give it roots in the city. The Irish came to realize that they could serve their needs by playing an active role in Lewiston's political life. Irishmen actively sought political office in the 1870's and increasing numbers of prominent Irish citizens were elected to the board of aldermen and the city council.

Several factors tended to improve the public viewpoint toward the Irish. The active role played by many Irishmen in the Civil War tended to enhance their public standing. Of equal importance, however, were the gradual improvements being made in their economic position. While it could not be said that by 1880 the Irish had achieved full integration and respectability, giant strides had been made. The Irish experience in Lewiston represented no "rags to riches" phenomenon. Progress was often slow and often slowest for those who had farthest to go. The majority of Irishmen who came to Lewiston in the 1850's and 1860's were poor, illiterate, and burdened by heavy family responsibilities. They adjusted to their condition as best they could, accepting the types of employment which were available, making small advances when the opportunities arose. Some were more fortunate than others and were able to achieve higher status through occupational advance or property accumulation. The experience of Lewiston's Irish demonstrates, that for these people at least, the American belief in mobility was indeed a myth.

– NOTES –

<sup>1</sup> John Hayward, *Hayward's New England Gazeteer* (Boston, 1856), p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Elder, *History of Lewiston* (Lewiston, 1882), pp. 10-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> William Lucey, *The Catholic Church in Maine* (Francestown, N.H., 1957), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> An intensive study of the manuscript census schedules has furnished information on not only occupation but also size of families and places of birth of children.

<sup>8</sup> The statistical information has been furnished by the 1850 census enumeration for Lewiston.

<sup>9</sup> This is a summarization of a much more detailed analytical study of occupational shifts in the period 1850-1880.

<sup>10</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), pp. 344-346.

<sup>11</sup> Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (New York, 1969), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> In 1870, Canadian immigrants accounted for only 13 percent of the common labor force; by 1880 they were the largest single group with about 44 per cent.

<sup>13</sup> The Lewiston city directories for 1860, 1864, 1872, 1878-79 were used as a source for places of employment in addition to the census data.

<sup>14</sup> A combination of sources – the census and random newspaper information – was used to fill in the careers of individuals.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> "Mayor's Address," *Annual Report of the City of Lewiston*, 1868, pp. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> “Report of the Overseers of the Poor,” *ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>20</sup> “Mayor’s Address,” *ibid.*, 1871, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1873, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> “Report of the Overseers of the Poor,” *ibid.*, 1872, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> “School Committee Report,” *ibid.*, 1868, pp. 84-86.

<sup>24</sup> “Mayor’s Address,” *ibid.*, 1871, pp. 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Statistical analysis reveals that only about 20 percent of laborer’s sons held unskilled jobs; about 60 percent were in semi-skilled positions and the remainder were in skilled or non-manual employment. These are only averages; the analysis indicates a wide percentage range depending on the age of the individuals.

<sup>28</sup> A full study of second generation families has not been conducted, but information which is available indicates a reduction in child labor in those families.

<sup>29</sup> *Lewiston Evening Journal*, July, 4, 1895, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19, 1876, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> The census schedules have provided some of this information; the remainder was secured from recorded deeds at the Androscoggin Registry of Deeds.

<sup>33</sup> “Report of the City Physician,” *Annual Report of the City of Lewiston*, 1871, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1877, pp. 70-71.

<sup>35</sup> Information on individuals, such as Patrick Marshall, has been gathered from census records, city directories, and random newspaper articles.

<sup>36</sup> In the 1850’s the only Irish Catholic chapel located on Lincoln was burned by a mob. There were also random examples of discrimination throughout the thirty year period of this study.