

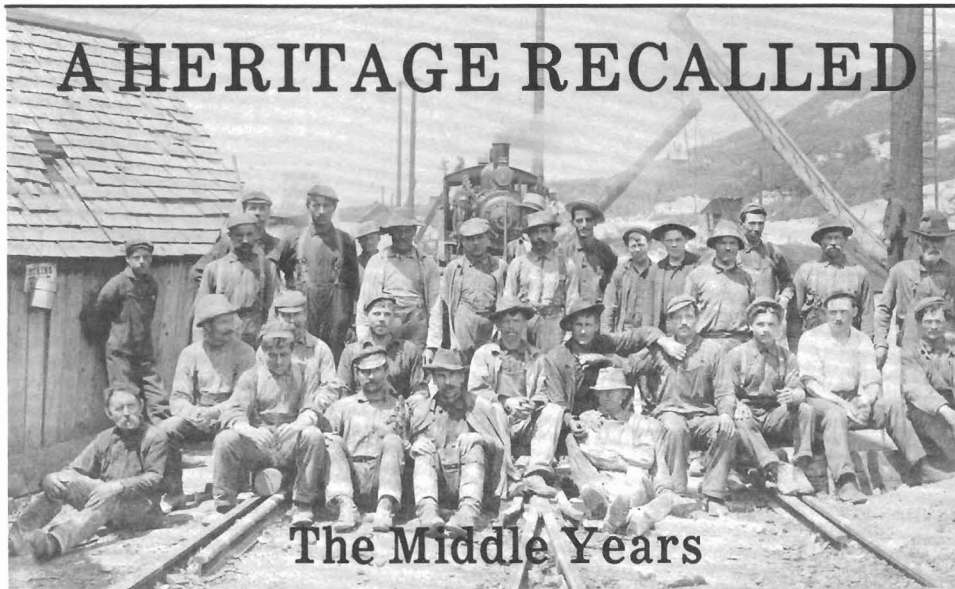
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A HERITAGE RECALLED



The Middle Years

THE IRISH IN RUTLAND IN 1880*

By Hugh Short

The year of 1880 was an active one for the Irish in Rutland, Vermont, as in the rest of the nation. Besides the perennial St. Patrick's Day celebration the new year began with a production by Howarth's Irish Character and Comedy Company before a large audience and closed with the formation of a branch of the National Land League on December 29, and J. D. Hanrahan, M.D. is the hero (or the villain) of the story of this Irish community.

Emigration was heaviest in the years following the Great Famine. By 1880 a generation of American-born Irish resided in the area; but many Irish-born still lived in Rutland, with some continuing immigration (Naturalization records show county origins; Roscommon was first, followed by Sligo and Mayo). For example, there were 19 marriages in which at least one of the partners was born in Ireland and 111 Rutland births out of 343 with at least one Irish-born parent. On the negative side, 19 died who had come from the old country. As reported in the *Rutland Herald and Globe*, on occasion, the Irish left for better opportunities in New Jersey, Boston, North Adams, Troy, Rochester, and Leadville, Colorado. (Two, O'Neil and Patten, are later in the year reported killed there.) Most, however, seemed to have settled into life in the Town of Rutland, residing in the village of East Rutland, Center Rutland, Sutherland Falls (now Proctor) and, specially, in West Rutland. The majority, particularly outside of the village, worked in the marble quarries.

One of the reasons for an excited year was the famine in Ireland, induced by the potato crop failure in 1879, with the consequent suffering in the winter and spring of 1880. This precipitated a visit to the United States by Charles Stewart Parnell,

*This article was prepared as an address to the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Rutland. Mr. Short is a resident of Chittenden.

In Volume XII No. 3 and Volume XIII No. 1 of the Rutland Historical Society Quarterly, the editors published the first two installments of a series of accounts of the ethnic heritage of Rutland.

The series began with an introductory overview of Rutland's diverse immigrants and then began chronologically with the arrival of the Irish and the French Canadians, the first of many immigrant groups who came to Rutland after the time of its settlement. The series continued with accounts of the Poles and Swedes.

The article on "The Irish in Rutland in 1880" would have appeared in an earlier issue but came to the attention of the editors after the series was started. Accounts relating to the Swedes will conclude in this issue, and articles relating to the Italians, Finns and smaller populations from Central Europe will continue in this and future Quarterlies. Copies of the first two issues in this series are available from the Society at \$3.00 a copy.

Irish Parliamentary leader, and John Dillon of the Land League. Ostensibly, they were raising funds for famine relief but were, by their lectures, presenting the case of the political and economic injustice inflicted on their country by the British government. Their trip is reported extensively in the *Herald*. On several occasions lengthy editorials expound the paper's editorial position on the Irish Question. On January 6, Parnell is labelled a "Fenian", and the editorial suggests, "... the best thing England can do for Ireland is to help the distressed peasantry to emigrate . . ." A month later a column on the editorial page is devoted to a sketch of the "Irish agitator's" life. But while the *Herald* is hostile to Parnell, it also deploras the tenant system that has impoverished the Irish.

Almost daily the paper reports the fund-raising for Irish relief throughout the United States and Canada. On February 21 it reports in "Local Notes" that such a collection will be taken up in Rutland's Catholic schools the following day. Many send help personally to friends and relatives in the suffering districts, and Mrs. P. McManus showed initiative in collecting money for the town of Geevah in County Sligo, including a \$50 contribution from Governor Proctor. The income from the St. Patrick's Day affair will likewise be donated for Irish relief; the *Herald* encourages its readers to attend. Throughout the nation parades and dinners were cancelled, with the money instead contributed for relief. On March 20 it was announced that the proceeds of the 17th in Rutland were \$335.85, with more to come. By June 7 Vermont Catholics had raised \$5,345 for the sufferers. (Throughout the Spring the controversies involving the three major relief agencies, the Dutchess of Marlboro's Mansion House Fund, that of James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* and Parnell's, are covered almost daily.) The Irish in Rutland, it seems, were kept well informed.

Life was not all news of suffering comrades, and, although sports did not have the role they do today, news of such activity sifted down to the Irish community. Living and training in Rutland was John McMahan, the Bakersfield native and wrestling champion. This was the era of collar and elbow wrestling, when Vermonters, especially Irishmen, dominated the world. In a well-publicized match, before 4,000 spectators in Boston against H. M. Dufur, March 16, 1880, no fall occurred, and a draw was declared. Later, in July, he defeats his cousin, James Owens, in a three hour match for the championship belt.

In April, there was an evening of indoor racing in the Town Hall put on by John Shea of Burlington, where Miss Jessie Monahan, a famous pedestrian, covered three miles, taking second place to Irvine, whose winning time was 30 minutes, 15 seconds. Pedestrian races in the nation and London, with walkers like Rowell, O'Leary and Sullivan, were reported, as well as skulling contests between Hanlon, Riley and Ross. The prize-fight victory of Paddy Ryan, from West Troy, over Joe Goss of New York City, was of interest to the Irish, perhaps more than the extensive coverage of the shooting match in Dublin between American and Irish teams. Yet only a moderate crowd turned out for a sparring match between Ryan and Charles McDonald, the champion of Canada, held in the Town Hall.

Local sports received meager coverage. Occasionally, a challenge baseball game would be mentioned with few details. Independence Day, however, was a big day for the Irish. It coincided with their anti-British sentiments, but the noise

