Women and Economy: Analyzing the Roles of Women in Irish-American
Communities during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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Abstract

The role of women within the local economy of the Irish community on Beaver Island, Michigan during the mid- to late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries has not yet been fully explored. With this project, I compare women's roles on Beaver Island to those in the Irish communities in San Francisco, California, and Butte, Montana. I illustrate the differences in resources, job availability, and social ideology within the three communities to account for the differences in women's roles in each of these Irish-American enclaves. In order to explore this research question, I analyzed various forms of archival information, including censes data from 1850 to 1930, house plans, oral histories, and photographs. The relative isolation and close-knit Irish community of Beaver Island created opportunities for female inhabitants and allowed them to be less burdened by the popular ideologies that permeated American middle-class culture than Irish women living in Butte or San Francisco.

Introduction

This project examines the roles of women within the local economies of the

Irish-American communities in Beaver Island, Michigan; Butte, Montana; and San

Francisco, California during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Fishing and farming were two of the main industries of Beaver Island's economy

during this time. Beaver Island women generally managed the household and the

children; however, many women found themselves working outside of the home as

well in order to support themselves and their families. Some women became

proprietors of their own small-businesses on the Island. Butte and San Francisco

were primarily mining towns. Like on Beaver Island, Butte women worked inside

and outside of the home out of necessity, often taking in boarders who worked in

the mines. In contrast, San Francisco had a much faster rate of development and

more resources at its disposal than did Beaver Island or Butte.

By analyzing censes, oral histories, historical documentation, and scholarly articles, I aimed to discover the factors that account for the similarities and differences in the roles of women within these three communities. Such factors as geographical region, differences in resource and job availability, and ideological views all contributed.

Theoretical Framework for Defining Gendered Social Relations

Gender is defined as the culturally constructed social identities, attributes, behaviors, privileges, and roles that a particular society designates as appropriate for men and women. By conceptualizing gender as a social structure one can "better analyze the ways in which gender is embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society" (Lorber 1994; Risman 1998; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Connell 2002; Risman 2004: 429; Rotman 2009). Acknowledging gender as a dynamic social configuration enriches the study of gender by leaving "behind the modernist warfare of science, wherein theories are pitted against one another, with a winner and a loser in every contest" (Risman 2004: 434). This understanding of gender offers a complex, yet insightful understanding of gender in society (Risman 2004; Martin 2004; Hollander et al. 2011). Gender roles within society and local economies can be better understood.

Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) have also suggested that there is a dichotomy between "a domestic orientation in women and a 'public' orientation in men", and had used this dichotomy to examine the role of women universally (Hanami 1993: 65). It is important to remember that while it is convenient to consider women's roles and men's roles as a dichotomy, this empirical view is sometimes too

simplistic for the reality of a given culture (Hanami 1993: 65; Lamphere 2001:100;

Rotman 2006). In many communities, the private and public spheres overlap

considerably, and men and women have varying degrees of authority within both of

these realms (Wurst 2003; Rotman 2009: 19). For women in middle and upper class

women in urban settings, the cult of domesticity's ideals of true womanhood and

purity led to a woman primarily working within the domestic sphere in nineteenth

and twentieth century America (Hanami 1993).

Ideologies behind Gendered Labor Divisions

Gender relations are tied to many other cultural and social constructions such

as sexuality, ethnicity, class, and race (Rotman 2009). Thus, it is vital to consider and

differentiate between gender roles and relations within particular social contexts.

Different cultural ideologies relating to gender arise in different locations and affect

communities to varying degrees. The adoption and implementation of gender

ideologies varies according to time and space, financial and social circumstances, the

abilities and desires of human agents, and developmental cycles of the family

(Rotman 2005, 2009; Thomas and Rotman 2011: 6). In order to understand how

gender ideologies affected gender roles within the three Irish American

communities, prominent cultural ideologies of nineteenth and twentieth centuries

will be discussed in this section.

In the late nineteenth century, old aristocratic values were replaced by new

Victorian values that were "drawn from the commercialism of the middle class"

(Brighton 2001: 22). By this time, capitalist culture permeated through all

socioeconomic classes in the United States (Miller 1987: 139-140; Shackel 1993: 41,

1996: 143; Brighton 2001: 22). Wage labor established two major categories: the business class and the working class (Coontz 1988: 187; Fitts 1999; Rotman 2009). The middle class identity emerged from these two classes. In order to maintain their identity, the middle class had to adopt particular "organizational and ideological strategies to survive" (Rotman 2009: 22). Women had an important role in the maintenance of the middle class identity because they were able to successfully "perceive problems of reproducing class position in a changing society and to develop family strategies that responded to those problems" (Coontz 1988: 190; Fitts 2001; Rotman 2009: 22).

The American "middle-class ideology was based, in part, on the concept of what was considered respectable or "genteel behavior" (Brighton 2001: 22). Especially after publications such as Catharine Beecher's *The Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), the cult of domesticity became a prevailing social ideology that influenced gendered labor divisions in late nineteenth century America (Sklar 1973; Hayden 1995:54-63; Beetham 1996; Rotman 2009). The ideology of true womanhood, or the cult of domesticity, emphasized separate working spheres for men and women (Rotman 2009: 19). Women's labor consisted of the "traditional roles in the home, education, and community service", while men were the wage earners in the public realm (Russell 1981:3; Rotman 2009). The ideology of the cult of domesticity included a physical separation of men and women's spheres (Rotman 2009). The cult of domesticity was one of the highly promoted ideologies of the day and as such, immigrants were pushed to adopt it once they arrived in America (Brighton 2001).

Understanding the influence of Victorianism and the cult of domesticity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America will be important for understanding Irish women's roles within the economies of Beaver Island, San Francisco, and Butte. The larger communities of San Francisco and Butte were more susceptible and responsive to the mainstream middle class ideologies than was Beaver Island. The community on Beaver Island was unique in that it was more reminiscent of rural Ireland than urban New York in terms of gender divisions of labor.

Women's Roles in Nineteenth Century Rural Ireland

In order to understand the relationship between gender and economy on Beaver Island, it is imperative to examine gender divisions of labor on rural Ireland. Nineteenth century rural Ireland had an agricultural-based economy. Farming relied heavily on manual labor. It was very economically beneficial to have a large family to work the farm. Thus, there was an emphasis on woman's role as mother and child-bearer (Fitzpatrick 1987; Nolan 1989: 29; Orser 2006: 146). Women were also in charge of other domestic duties such as cooking and tending to the turf fire and the hearth (Evans 1957; Sharkey 1985; Carleton 1990: 24; Carleton 1990:100; Hooper 2001: 71; Hull 2006: 147-8).

Women were often part of communal working parties called *meitheal*, working as field laborers during harvest time (Hull 2006: 153; O'Dowd 1981). These women were not confined to domestic duties; they also worked at "'many of the most painstaking and back-breaking of pursuits'" (Hull 2006: 148; Fitzpatrick 1987: 166). Women labored alongside men "and generally performed the same agricultural

tasks for wages as they did at home, although they were generally only paid half as much as men" (Hull 2006: 153; Luddy 1995). In this patriarchal society, agrarian women had opportunities to share in many of the same occupations as men in the field and farmstead. In places like Árainn Mhór, where people and resources were scarce, it would have been vital for women to contribute to the local economy in any way that they could. There were not the same physical separations in defining gender roles in Ireland as there were in America.

Historical Development of Three Irish-American Communities

The Irish-American communities of San Francisco, Butte, and Beaver Island each have distinct local histories that shaped every aspect of their unique cultures. Understanding the historical developments of each of these communities provides the context from which the gendered divisions of labor emerged.

The Irish in San Francisco

As a relatively large city in the United States, San Francisco held the more popular ideologies on gendered division of labor. There was most likely a greater pressure to conform to more universal standards because of the higher degree of diversification in the city. The middle class living in San Francisco embraced Victorian ideals and the cult of domesticity. As a result, class-consciousness developed once more and more Irish women became small business owners. Beaver Island, Michigan and Butte, Montana were more isolated and had less development than San Francisco so that seems to account for how women's proprietorship and status were viewed in these communities.

During the mid to late nineteenth century, Irish immigrants arrived in San Francisco from both coasts. In 1852, 44.5 per cent of Irish came from Australasia and 44.6 percent came from the eastern U.S. (Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1957*, 1960: 57; Jones 1960: 109-10; McCaffrey 1976: 61; Burchell 1980: 34). Once gold was discovered in Victoria, Canada in 1851, immigration from Australasia ceased. The eastern United States, especially New York, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and Massachusetts, became the main places from which the Irish would leave to reach California. In 1880, "20 percent of the Irish in San Francisco held white collar jobs", while "only 13 percent held similar jobs in New York" (McDannell 1986: 12; Bureau of Census, *MS Census*, 1880). Such statistics suggest that Irish social mobility was more rapid in San Francisco than it was in northeastern cities, like New York, Boston or Providence, in the years 1870 to 1950 (Erie 1978: 270). In 1880, "of 12,902 children in Irish families in the city not born in California, 7,790, or 60.4 per cent, had been born in these three cities" (Walker 1872: 396, 448-9; Burchell 1980: 34). There is little evidence that suggests migration directly from Ireland prior to the 1850s. Irish settlers nearly all would have initially migrated elsewhere before arriving in San Francisco in the 1850s and 1860s.

Gradually, however, Irish began coming in San Francisco directly from various counties including County Cork, County Mayo, County Galway, and County Westmeath, in much greater numbers, especially after the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 (Burchell 1980: 7, 35). The railroad greatly improved and eased mobility of migrants from the east coast to the west coast (Burchell 1980).

San Francisco was a prominent city in the nineteenth century because it experienced population and economic growth exceeding that of most other western cities (Erie 1978). Because of its early development, the city became an important location for "federal and state activities, e.g., the Custom House, Mint, Post Office, and Presidio" (Erie 1978: 271). In comparison to counties in the eastern United States, counties in California were responsible for a wider array of functions, so when the city and the county consolidated power during mid-nineteenth century, an unusual amount of municipal jobs emerged. Job availability and increasing population size allowed for the city to flourish during the late nineteenth century (Garvey et al. 2008; Burchell 1980; Erie 1978).

In San Francisco, the societal expectations for women followed popular American ideologies, such as Victorianism and the cult of domesticity, that had been prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kazin, 1987; Burchell, 1980). While some Irish women had jobs as teachers or small business owners, such occupations were not considered worthy of social elevation (Burchell 1980; Sparks 2006). Elite and middle class women would marry and concern themselves with maintaining the household. Many women who lived in well-established households would also become involved in philanthropy (Burchell 1980). The prosperity of San Francisco led to many opportunities for employment; however, social norms of the time often dictated the types of jobs in which women would be employed. Because of the heterogeneous population and urbanization of the city, the wealth and socioeconomic status of individuals living in San Francisco became of greater importance than their ethnic background.

Early History of the Irish in Butte, Montana

Similarly to California migration, immigration to Butte, Montana flowed from the major port cities in the eastern United States. The Irish first arrived in Butte Montana after residing in the Eastern and Midwestern United States (Emmons 1989; O'Neill 2003). In the late 1800s, the Irish would come straight to Butte through Canada or the northeastern United States. These Irish immigrants originated primarily from County Cork, but also from County Mayo and County Donegal (Emmons 1989; O'Neill 2003). In 1900, Butte had a population of 47,635, and 12,000 of those residents were of Irish descent (Emmons 1989). Thus, Butte reportedly had a higher percentage of people of Irish descent than any other major American city at the turn of the twentieth century (Emmons 1989). By this time, the Irish in Butte gained the social, political, and economic control of the mining town (Emmons 1989; O'Neill 2003; Mercier 2006).

While class-consciousness did exist in Butte, it was not hierarchical in the same way as it was in San Francisco. There was "no opprobrium attached to being an established Irish miner in Butte, and no social disgrace to associating with them" (Emmons 1989: 182; Bodnar 1985). The Irish inhabitants of Butte viewed the city as a working class community.

Because of the early Irish control of Butte society, the Irish were very concerned with preserving their enclave (Emmons 1989). They were not as concerned with class as they were with maintaining a reliable workforce. The inhabitants of Butte were focused on "[s]teadiness, stability, settling in or at least intending to settle in, together with Irishness" because they were the ones who

"determined the manner in which new recruits would be integrated into the work force" (Bodnar 1982; Emmons 1989: 182). The Irish knew that in order to maintain the "ethnic consciousness", they would have to look beyond socioeconomic differences within the community (Burchell 1980; Emmons 1989: 198).

Along with the concern for the conservation of the Irish working class enclave, there was also a concern for the preservation of family life. There was a pressure for Irish women to conform to the community's emphasis on family and family life. Because of this stress on family life, single women who did not want to marry or "conform to Irish codes of proper marriage" would typically leave the area in order to "pursue occupational, educational, and other interests elsewhere" (Mercier 1994: 31). The Irish women who remained in this mining town were primarily in charge of running their households and raising the children. Married women also often supplemented their family income by opening their homes up for bachelor smelter workers who needed room and board (Mercier 1994). Widows received support from neighbors, but would not receive much support from the smelting company itself (Mercier 1994). Some widows would likewise rent out rooms in their homes or even start other small businesses. For the most part, however, they would have to work from home in order to take care of their children (Mercier 1994).

Beaver Island As An Irish Enclave

More so than in San Francisco and Butte, Irish immigrants to Beaver Island originated in very select regions in Ireland. During the mid-nineteenth century, Irish from Árainn Mhór, as well as County Donegal and County Mayo, were steadily

migrating to northern Michigan to settle alongside family and friends on Beaver Island (Connors 1999: 2; Collar 1976: 33). Others from Árainn Mhór who had first arrived in New York, Pennsylvania and Canada eventually moved to Beaver Island to live amongst their relatives (Connors 1999). When the Irish first came to Beaver Island, they would write back to family remaining in Donegal, mentioning how "[Beaver Island] was like Ireland" (Collar 1976: 43; Thomas and Rotman 2011). Beaver Island rapidly turned into a fishing community "predominantly Irish in origin" (Collar 1976: 29). The island developed into a unique Irish enclave because of its physical isolation from any major urban areas, and the chain migrations of families and neighbors directly from Árainn Mhór to the Island (Connors 1999). The Árainn Mhór Irish who moved to Beaver Island found that they could apply what they knew of fishing and farming to this new place. As a result, the Irish were able to continue their traditional ways of living and maintain the cohesive social organization that they had on Árainn Mhór.

While there was increased revenue and relative prosperity with the commercial fishing industry, subsistence farming still persisted, and the reliance on neighbors and family members remained strong through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because there were more capitalistic opportunities in Butte and San Francisco, there were more distinctions between the working and the business classes than there were on Beaver Island. The economy of Beaver Island reflected that of rural Ireland more than industrialized America (Collar 1976; Hull 2006). While the major industries of fishing and lumber were male-dominated, women were integral in the household and farmstead (Connors 1999). Although the Irish

community remained patriarchal in its early stages, women on Beaver Island were not as confined to the rigidly defined female roles encouraged by the popular American ideologies of the time. In order to support their families and themselves, women managed the household, helped work the farm, raised the children, and helped run businesses. In some cases, women ran their own businesses. Because the Irish were able to transplant their communal way of living to Beaver Island, they also created a collaborative economy with gender roles similar to what they had on Árainn Mhór (Connors 1999).

Each of these Irish American communities during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was influenced by various physical factors including geography, demography, and resource availability. Together with particular ideological and sociopolitical influences, these factors led to the emergence of the unique women's roles within these three communities.

Methodology

For this project, data collection consisted of reviewing the historical documentation, including the written documents, transcriptions of oral histories, artifacts, and photographs from Beaver Island in order to understand the effects of the prosperous fishing industry on the local community. I conducted additional oral history interviews with Beaver Island residents who are descendants of the original Irish settlers of the Island. The information gathered from the oral histories and archives was used to determine the extent of the relative distribution of wealth of the various Beaver Island families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. This information also helped me to determine the extent of class-consciousness and social hierarchy on Beaver Island during this time.

I reviewed historical documentation, photographs, and other archival material that pertained to the other industries on Beaver Island in order to analyze the local economy as a whole. In addition to this, I read scholarly articles and books on the economies of Butte, Montana and San Francisco, California to gather information for a comparison of the three communities. To get a sense of the types of employment women were engaged in, as well as their marital status, I analyzed aggregate data and raw census enumerations ranging from the years 1870 to 1930. I also read scholarly articles about prominent nineteenth and twentieth century cultural ideologies and understandings of gender in order to better assess the role of women in each of the Irish American communities.

Comparative Analyses of Gender Roles and Relations

San Francisco, Butte, and Beaver Island are geographically, physically, and historically distinct from one another. They each developed Irish-American communities within varying socioeconomic climates and circumstances. As a result, particular gendered roles and social relations emerged in each of these locales. The following data contextualizes the gendered social relations that developed in San Francisco, Butte, and Beaver Island during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The statistics and examples provided illustrated the differences in the socioeconomic and cultural settings created by each of these communities.

Occupational Roles for Women in San Francisco

In the aftermath of the Gold Rush in the mid-nineteenth century, San Francisco experienced increased population growth and urbanization (Burchell 1980). This population growth created an influx of job opportunities for both men and women (Burchell 1980: 57; Sparks 2006). At the same time, greater economic disparity between classes emerged, as did greater class-consciousness. Even though there were more job opportunities, many women still only worked within the home because of the valorization of domestic duty by the increasingly popular Victorian ideals and the cult of domesticity permeating middle-class America at the time (Kazin 1987; Beetham 1996; Sparks 2006).

In San Francisco, single women typically worked as servants, teachers and laborers (Burchell 1980; Sparks 2006). One common employment opportunity for Irish women was to work as a laundress. While women dominated the laundry industry, it was the men who were employed in the higher-level management positions, and women were left with the lower paying jobs (Burchell 1980: 57; Sparks 2006: 49). In the apparel trades, female apparel proprietors dressed well and "often interacted intimately with the most sophisticated ladies in urban society", which would have seemed like a beneficial opportunity for second generation Irish women because it was a means of separating themselves from their Irish heritage, and establishing themselves as Americans (Sparks 2006: 53). Women who had been teachers prior to marriage usually had to stop teaching "in the name of upholding the sanctity of marriage and women's unpaid work in the home" (Sparks 2006: 65).

In San Francisco, it was simply self-preservation that acted as the motivation for women to own their own small businesses (Burchell 1980; Sparks 2006; Garvey and Hanning, 2008). However, it is important to note that the owning of small businesses was not a particularly lucrative endeavor. Small business ownership was considered "a humble economic achievement, one that often afforded a 'respectable' income but accorded proprietors little status in the eyes of class-conscious women" (Sparks 2006: 48; Garvey and Hanning 2008: 28). Irish women were able to obtain small proprietorship largely because they made up a large portion of the city's working population.

In 1880, the San Francisco "Irish of both [first and second] generations married other Irish 90 percent of the time" (Burchell 1980: 52-60; Emmon 1989: 82). In San Francisco, married women generally turned to tasks that were more amenable to their responsibilities in the home. Typically, if married women worked outside of the home, they would work as laundresses and merchants (Burchell 1980).

The effects of the national ideologies about domesticity and true womanhood were adhered to quite ardently among many of the middle and working class Irish in San Francisco. One of the industries that emphasized its "maleness" was the construction industry. In San Francisco, many of men who worked in the industry felt that a married woman should only work outside the house "when the alternative was their own or their children's starvation" (Kazin 1987: 77). Men did not expect respectable married women to work. Their concept of self-respect was "thus equated with the Victorian domestic ideal" (Erie 1978; Kazin

1987: 77). The women who married the leaders of the San Francisco Building Construction Trades Council "seem to have faithfully adhered to this [Victorian domestic] model themselves" (Kazin 1987: 77). These women stayed within "the 'separate sphere' of their home and children and took little apparent interest in their husbands' career" (Kazin 1987: 77). Men were determined to maintain construction work as an all-male industry, and as a result of excluding women, they "made their own power over the building industry a symbol for what 'true men' could achieve" (Kazin 1987: 78).

Another interesting set of data that illustrates the strength of certain domestic ideologies in San Francisco are the divorce cases. The records of divorce cases demonstrate the expectation that a married woman was to work within their households (Sparks 2006). Men would most often accuse women of "desertion, or 'dereliction of domestic duty'" (Sparks 2006: 76). Even the state courts upheld the male expectation that wives are primarily homemakers, as evidenced by the fact that women were convicted of desertion more often than men (Sparks 2006: 76).

San Francisco was a highly urbanized, heterogeneous area in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Burchell 1980; Kazin 1987). As such, San Francisco was exposed to and influenced by a wider variety of people and opportunities. As it began to do so, the city's inhabitants adjusted by adopting the popular American gender ideologies. Butte, Montana became similar to San Francisco in the ways its growth led to an embrace of American identity and ideology by its citizens.

Identifying the Roles of Women in Butte, Montana

By the late nineteenth century, Butte developed into a successful, industrial mining town. As the prosperity increased in Butte, the job opportunities and population grew. Because the mining was by far the most dominant industry in Butte, much of the women's roles were developed as a means of meeting the needs of the male miners (Emmons 1989; Mercier 1994). Although there was an economic disparity between the business and working class, the Irish in Butte tended to be more concerned with trying to maintain the strength of their Irish enclave as opposed to adhering to a strict social hierarchy (Emmons 1989).

Similarly to San Francisco, single women in Butte were able to find a variety of employment opportunities prior to getting married. In Butte, "ninety percent of [single women] worked as maids, domestics, kitchen helpers, seamstresses, or launderers" and the other ten percent "included teachers, nuns, shopkeepers, and boardinghouse managers"(Bureau of Census, *MS Census*, 1900,1910; Diner 1983: 20-29, 72, 120-121, 126-29; Emmons 1989: 76). However, most women would eventually get married, and their responsibilities and economic opportunities would change.

There were "3,300 immigrant Irish in Butte in 1900. Out of those 3,300, "2,100 were single. Of the nearly 1,200 whom were married, fewer than 100 married before immigrating to the United States" (Bureau of Census, *MS Census*, 1900; Emmons 1989: 189). According to Emmons, memories of "evictions, emigrations, mine closures, and enforced idleness" did not fade away for the Irish because there was still not a sense of financial security or stability (Emmons 1989:

189). The Irish were relatively conservative and cautious, especially when the family was particularly large (Emmons 1989). The majority of Irish men and women that arrived in Butte were unmarried and below the age of the thirty when they emigrated (Emmons 1989). Marriage to other Irish was an important aspect of becoming part of the Butte Irish enclave (Emmons 1989; Mercier 1994). Once married, some women "earned income by housing and feeding bachelor smelter workers"(Mercier 1994: 31). Some of the women "constructed and leased small cabins on the tiny lots behind their houses, while others rented rooms despite cramped family living space" (Mercier 1994: 31).

In regard to conserving traditional Irish culture in Butte, the men were more concerned with passing down the Irish folk traditions and memories than were the women. The Irish women were seemingly "more realistic in their approach to life in America", and they more readily forgot the traditions and memories of Ireland (O'Sullivan 1989; Dowling 1989: 59). They focused more on cultivating their American identity rather than "dreaming of returning to Ireland" (O'Sullivan 1989; Dowling 1989: 59). This is significant because the men had a higher death rate than their wives, and as a result, "the folk culture of Ireland that was the staple of the Gaelic League did not form an integral part of community life" among the Butte Irish (Dowling 1989: 59).

Considering the extremely hazardous nature of Butte's primary industry, it is not surprising that widowhood was fairly prevalent in this mining town (Dowling 1989: 58). In Butte, widows received support from neighbors, but did not receive much from the Anaconda Company itself. Some of them rented out rooms in their

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homes; some had enough money to start boardinghouses or small businesses, and most had to work from home so that they could also tend to their children. The following is a passage from David Emmons's book *The Butte Irish* (1989, 71). This illustrates the prevalence of widowhood in Butte as a result of the dangerous work in the mines:

> In 1900 there were 153 Irish widows under fifty years of age with a combined total of 392 children living at home; in 1910 the figures were 434 and 1,117. A closer look at what these numbers meant can be had by considering the 100 block of East La Platta Street in 1910. There were ten homes on the block, eight of them occupied by Irish widows. The women ranged in age from thirty-two to fifty-five; six had been born in Ireland, two in Michigan of Irish parents. Four of them rented rooms to single miners; three had working children; one sold milk and eggs; and two were without visible means of support. A combined total of forty-eight children had been born to the eight; thirty-four of them were still living, and thirty-two of those, ranging in age from two years to twenty-four, were living at home.

The description of the high concentration of widows could perhaps lend some insight into why women were more willing to let go of their Irish culture and to become American (Dowling 1989). The women were aware of the precariousness of their situation, and knew that it was more practical to concentrate on having stability in America, rather than imagining a return to Ireland.

Whereas the women of Butte and San Francisco were more pressured to adhere to certain expectations permeating popular American culture, on rural and agricultural Beaver Island, women were less constrained by such social norms. The rural nature of the Island created opportunities for women in the economic sphere. Women were able to adopt in a wide range of occupations in order to help sustain the community.

Marriage and Women's Roles on Beaver Island

During the late nineteenth century, rural Beaver Island became a prosperous

Irish community that thrived off of a successful commercial fishing industry

(Conners 1999; Vandenheede 2002). Despite the relative increase in prosperity,

there was no significant class-consciousness within the community. The communal

nature of Beaver Island remained because of the strong familial ties amongst the

Irish. Both men and women had a variety of economic outlets in order to sustain a

certain standard of living (LaFreniere 2011). Outside influences, including the

prominent American ideologies popular in more urban settings did not have as

strong of an impact as they had in Butte and San Francisco. In contrast, Beaver

Island society had a separation of roles similar to that on Ireland. On Beaver Island,

men and women would have separate gatherings; they formed separate sub-

societies based on their gender (Cashman 2012). Men would have more formalized

meetings, but women would also have designated social time where they would

discuss the "foibles of men" (Cashman 2012). Social dynamics on Beaver Island may

have allowed "some women to join the workforce to authenticate their choice of the

women's subsociety as the source of their identity and value" (Cashman 2012).

Thus, women's roles were not as rigidly defined as they were in those more

densely populated areas. One woman in particular, Sophia Boyle, demonstrates the

ways in which women were able to find unique opportunities to make a living on

Beaver Island. Sophia became a business owner prior to getting married, and

continued to run a store alongside her husband once she eventually became married

(Connaghan 2011; LaFreniere 2011). She was able to stay in the business world

after marriage because of the limited number of people on the island and the demand for her merchandise. In this sense, the Beaver Island community created unique economic opportunities for women during this time.

Because of the virtually homogeneous Irish population on Beaver Island, the vast majority of the marriages were endogamous, with a few exceptions. Almost "eighty-five percent of the island population in the mid-1880 was of Irish extraction, and the persistency rate of Irish households, between 1870 and 1880, was around eighty percent" (Conners 1999: 155; Duke and Rotman 2011). Furthermore, more than "eighty percent of all island marriages between 1866 and 1898 were endogamous" (Connors 1999: 155; Duke and Rotman 2011). Most of Irish families that settled on Beaver Island were related to one another, and as a result, a very close-knit community was maintained. The community-oriented nature of Beaver Island is well reflected by the process of marriage and remarriage on the Island. In the following interview excerpt, Fr. Dan Connaghan (2011) explains how the Irish on Beaver Island responded to widowhood by recounting the story of his great-grandmother:

> Now, what they did on the island, and primarily through Father Peter Gallagher and his so-called Bachelor Club…they would figure out what available men were there that could marry this widow with her children and provide support for them. So, they picked my great-grandfather, Hugh Connaghan, who was in his forties, and she was in her twenties, and they proceeded to have another six children, six more children. Then he died at the age of sixty-four in 1894 of a heart attack. Now, she's a widow now a second time with eight children of which the youngest was about five or six years old, Mabel Cull who later lived next door here. So, for the second-third time, for the second time, Father Gallagher got them together and said "Now what are we going to do with the widow Brigid?"…They found Larry McDonough, who was a bachelor, much older. He married her…and they raised the eight children.

Fr. Dan Connaghan's anecdote demonstrates the Beaver Island Irish's strong

orientation toward community. They took great care of members of their

community who were in need. This unrelenting commitment to the welfare of

everyone in the Irish community is what differentiates Beaver Island from the Irish

communities in Butte and San Francisco.

Conclusion: Demography, Class, and Gender

A key factor of the gender roles and ideology that are established in these

Irish American communities is the difference in the conception of class within each

of these groups. The job availability in each location played a part in determining

what type of work women were allowed to partake in and what kind of work held

social prestige (Burchell 1980; Emmons 1989; Mercier 1994; Sparks 2006). The

economic foundations of each community and the class structures that developed

influenced the capacity of women's roles and opportunities.

Having developed as a prosperous city earlier than Butte and Beaver Island,

San Francisco was much more hierarchical in terms of social status (Kazin 1987;

Sparks 2006). In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, San Francisco experienced rapid

population growth (Kazin 1987; Burchell 1980). There were already well-

established families by the mid to late nineteenth century that formed the elite and

middle classes, and then as more and more immigrants flooded the city, greater

class divisions and stricter distinctions developed (Burchell 1980).

In Butte, there were class divisions similar to San Francisco. For example, the

West Side was understood as designated for the Irish aristocracy, where the middle

and upper class Irish resided. The working-class Irish lived in another part of the

town (Emmons 1989: 79). Butte, like San Francisco, grew rapidly and was influenced by the domestic ideals promoted by American society. Thus, there were certainly class divisions and class awareness in Butte. However, differences in class among the Butte Irish were overlooked to some degree in an attempt to protect the "prosperity and stability Irish enclave (Emmons 1989: 156). The merchant class and the working-class miners were both striving to maintain a degree of social prestige within Butte as Irishmen. The recognition of the need for preservation of the Irish enclave, with the threat of the increasingly heterogeneous population of Butte, allowed the Irish to reconcile socioeconomic differences in an attempt to retain the strength of their Irish community (Emmons 1989). Nonetheless, there is no question that socioeconomic distinctions were acknowledged, and helped determine what roles both men and women could have in order to maintain their social status (Mercier 1994; Emmons 1989; Dowling 1989).

Beaver Island did not have the strict class divisions observed in San Francisco and Butte. Because of rural nature and relative isolation of Beaver Island, the Islanders were able to avoid conforming wholly to national ideologies more easily than the more heavily populated, industrialized areas. The occupational roles on Beaver Island were not even so much reflective of being Irish as of being an Islander. Island economies in general function differently than those on the mainland (Connors 1999). Because there was less of a chance of something drastically unexpected, or dangerous, happening on Beaver Island, the Irish were willing to fully commit to settling there. Among the Irish on Beaver Island, there was

a "stronger sense of 'this is what we've got so let's accept it, and incorporate it into our way of life'" than there was in San Francisco or Butte (Cashman 2012).

The gender spheres in Ireland were articulated differently than they were in America (Hull 2006). There was a separation of spheres in Ireland that translated to the Irish Beaver Island community, but it did not revolve around the American notion of domesticity. Rather, it seems to have reflected the nature of agricultural labor (Hull 2006). Similarly to the Árainn Mhór community, the Beaver Island community necessarily had to be supportive and act as a cohesive whole in order to survive (Connaghan 2011; LaFreniere 2011; LaFreniere McDonough 2001). Living in an isolated, rural area, women and men worked together in order to have the various industries function properly. The Islanders, particularly the women, did what they could to survive and contribute to their family's well being. Women like Sophia Boyle were looked upon as savvy businesswomen (LaFreniere 2011; LaFreniere McDonough 2001). Sophia was able to continue working in the business world even after she was married. She did not confine herself to unpaid work in the household. She was able to work alongside her husband in certain business ventures, and this collaboration was not looked down upon. The idea of living up to, or maintaining, a certain social status was not a major concern for members of the community (Connaghan 2011; LaFreniere 2011; O'Donnell and Smith 2011).

Class-consciousness was not as prevalent on Beaver Island in part because most of the families were related, and the community was very close-knit (Connaghan 2011; LaFreniere 2011). Beaver Island reflected the Old World patriarchal views of Ireland rather than New World views. Like nineteenth century

rural Ireland, Beaver Island women had more unique opportunities for employment that coinciding with their need to survive and support their family and the community (Hull 2006). While men and women constituted distinct social groups, women were found working both independently and alongside men on the farms and in the stores as merchants in order to maintain a certain standard of living.

In many ways, even though the Irish Beaver Islanders took up capitalistic ventures and participated in the larger fishing and logging industries, the community as a whole still very much reflected that which they had on Árainn Mhór. The middle class ideologies of cult of true womanhood did not apply as strictly to those on Beaver Island as they did in the middle classes of Butte and San Francisco. With greater urbanization and industrialization along with the increasingly heterogeneous populations, Butte and San Francisco lent themselves more readily to national trends and ideologies than did Beaver Island (Sparks 2006; Kazin 1987; Burchell 1980).

Job and resource availability was greater in Butte and San Francisco than on Beaver Island (Burchell 1980; Emmons 1989; Sparks 2006). Men and women of Beaver Island took advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them. The idea of status was less important than maintaining a sustainable community. A uniquely strong support system in Beaver Island emerged from the nature of Island living, the shared Irish heritage, and the familial connections. Even those who were not Irish could not help but be influenced by the Irishness of the Island community (Connors 1999). The island adhered to gender ideologies that more closely mirrored Old World views rather than New World views (Thomas and Rotman 2011). Thus,

being in a rural, physically isolated place, having a virtually homogenous population, and the degree of familial relatedness on the Island can account for the shaping of the distinct nature of gendered social relations and the employment opportunities for women on Beaver Island.

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