

SHILLELAGHS, SHOVELS, AND SECRETS:  
IRISH IMMIGRANT SECRET SOCIETIES AND THE BUILDING OF INDIANA  
INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS, 1835-1837

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IHSPC	Indiana Historical Society Pamphlet Collection
IHSMC	Indiana Historical Society Manuscript Collection
ISAMC	Indiana State Archives Manuscript Collection
ISLNC	Indiana State Library Newspaper Collection
NCBLNP	Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers database
NCUSNP	Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers database
AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians

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## INTRODUCTION

Six hundred Irish immigrant laborers stopped digging the Wabash and Erie Canal in July of 1835, but they did not put down their shovels. Instead, the 600 marched toward a predetermined battlefield near Lagro, Indiana, transforming their tools from shovel to shillelagh. The object of the workers' hostility was not the local citizenry, laborers from another country, or the canal's contractors. Instead, the laborers organized in opposing factions, one known as the Corkonians and the other called the Fardowns, determined to battle each other. The Corkonians took their name from County Cork, the largest and most populous county in southwestern Ireland; the Fardowns' name derived from an old colloquialism for those from Ireland's northern counties. With the prospective combatants gathered at the chosen ground and agitation running high on both sides, the specter of all out war threatened to disrupt the important work of building the Wabash and Erie, the crown jewel of Indiana's ambitious internal improvement plan. Militia units from surrounding towns hastened to the scene, promptly restoring order to the Indiana frontier, and arresting as many participants as they could find. As quickly as the riot began it was seemingly over, the proposed battle narrowly avoided.

While the Corkonians and Fardowns forged a relative peace thereafter on the Wabash and Erie, animosity between workers representing the two groups surfaced on other Indiana internal improvement projects. Just twenty months later in Indianapolis near a construction site on the Central Canal, a half-dozen Corkonians killed a Fardown man. After another three-month lull, hostilities renewed near Vernon and the Madison



and Indianapolis Railroad. Several hundred Corkonians and Fardowns rioted in Vernon, leaving at least two dead, scores wounded, and local citizens in shock.

This thesis examines the events and origins of the “Indiana Irish Wars.” The disturbances between Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana between 1835 and 1837 were neither singular, random events nor were such conflicts proprietary to Indiana. The disturbances existed as part of a larger pattern of incidents between the two factions occurring on internal improvement projects in the United States and Canada in the middle part of the nineteenth century. The origins of these feuds were neither old religious rivalries born anew in America (as dismissed by a century of Indiana historians) nor a case of the Irish brawling for the “for the hell of fighting” (as proposed by an engineer on the Delaware and Hudson Canal).<sup>1</sup> Instead, the Corkonian and Fardown feuds in Indiana and elsewhere existed as part of a transatlantic phenomenon of region-based Irish secret societies formed to defend, violently if needed, the economic interests of fellow society members. The Corkonians and Fardowns organized in response to the limited economic opportunities available for Irish immigrants, and utilized methods similar to peasant secret societies existing in Ireland. Conflict between the two factions was rooted in attempts to drive each other from work sites, thus securing employment for their own exclusive membership.

There are four chapters in this thesis. *Chapter I* introduces the Corkonian and Fardown feuds in Indiana, including discussion of the treatment of the feud by Indiana-centric scholars and their conclusions as to the nature of the feuds. *Chapter I* also discusses the origins of the elusive term “Fardown,” the geographical origins of the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger: Irish Canal Workers in Nineteenth Century America,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1987), 152.

Corkonians and Fardowns, and the historical context of their rivalry as it existed in Ireland. The chapter concludes by summarizing the factors stimulating 1830s Irish emigration, why the Irish migrated to Indiana to work on internal improvement projects, and the general work and social conditions associated with canal and railroad labor. *Chapter II* analyzes pre-famine Irish immigrant tendencies to remain tied to Irish cultural traditions, including their reliance on social networks dictated by region of origin in Ireland. *Chapter II* also explores the Irish peasant traditions of faction fighting and the related creation of secret societies such as the Whiteboy and Ribbon movements. The chapter concludes by showing how these peasant traditions transported to North America, mutating into the creation of protective fraternal organizations and secret societies such as the Corkonians and Fardowns. *Chapter III* opens by explaining the Corkonian and Fardown feud as it occurred in other states before arriving in Indiana. The chapter provides details on the events and aftermath of a series of Corkonian and Fardown clashes, including the Wabash and Erie riot and the lesser known Central Canal and Madison and Indianapolis Railroad incidents. *Chapter IV* places the actions of the Corkonians and Fardowns within the context of other rioting in the same era, offers a theory on why Indiana historians have misinterpreted the actions of these groups, and explains how labor-related Irish immigrant secret societies eventually faded into the burgeoning organized labor movements.

## CHAPTER I

### “A SHOVEL, A PICK, A WHEELBARROW, AND AN IRISHMAN”

At first glance, the Corkonians and Fardowns seem to have had more reasons to express unity rather than sharing a hostile rivalry. Both groups recently emigrated from Ireland. Each endured shared hardships in adapting to their new surroundings. They also shared a unique culture bred within the brutal conditions of canal and railroad construction. Despite these factors of commonality, the Corkonians and Fardowns waged war in the fledgling state of Indiana, inflicting injury and occasionally causing death. Threatening the peace and safety of citizens, the Corkonians and Fardowns interrupted the progress of internal improvements such as canals and railroads.

Historian Peter Way, speaking of a similar Corkonian and Fardown battle on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in 1834, noted that such conflicts appeared to contemporaries and historians to be “simply ethnic conflict, rival factions of Irish brawling yet again for reasons long lost in the haze of history. It did not involve job concerns and was an incident of labour violence only to the extent that labourers were involved.”<sup>2</sup> Way’s summation of the casual dismissal by historians of Corkonian and Fardown feuds helps explain why the events in Indiana have received relatively little scholarly attention. References to Indiana’s conflicts are most commonly found in works of local, state, or canal history, and often cite only the incident occurring along the Wabash and Erie while ignoring the related events on the Central Canal and Madison and Indianapolis Railroad. In these histories, the brief treatment given to the Corkonians and

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of the North American Canals 1780-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 201.

Fardowns usually amounts to a single paragraph describing their actions as a peculiar anecdote or as an incident of local color. Often dubbed the “Indiana Irish War” or “Indiana Irish Wars,” few sources truly probe the nature or cause of the conflict.

There is a plausible defense for historians who have overlooked, ignored, or arrived at incomplete conclusions regarding the Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana: they did not make it easy for historians to study them. Members of each group were transient, working on one internal improvement project briefly and then moving on to the next. They left few records such as journals, letters, or diaries behind. Irish immigrants of the 1830s were largely illiterate; by 1841, only 28 percent of Ireland could read and write. The majority of the literate belonged to a social and economic class unlikely working as unskilled immigrant laborers on North American canals and railroads.<sup>3</sup>

Primary sources relating to the Indiana Irish Wars are scarce. The majority of available originate from unsympathetic observers ignorant of the complicated nature of the feud. These sources include newspapers and a limited amount of correspondence from those involved in suppressing Corkonian and Fardown uprisings. For example, most Indiana-centered accounts of the Corkonian and Fardown feuds rely on a single letter canal commissioner David Burr sent to Governor Noah Noble regarding the 1835 Wabash and Erie Canal riot.<sup>4</sup> The official records for Indiana’s canals and railroads largely address construction and finances; few records address personnel issues or the laborers themselves. For the purposes of this thesis, sources include Burr’s letter and other correspondence, newspaper accounts, local histories, and contemporary diaries,

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<sup>3</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70.

<sup>4</sup> For the letter, see David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers Relating to the Administration of Noah Noble, Governor of Indiana, 1831-1837* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1958), 419-423.

most overlooked in other studies. Primary and secondary sources representing Corkonian and Fardown feuds in other states supplement the Indiana sources to place the Indiana Irish Wars in a national (and transatlantic) context.

The existing body of scholarly work addressing the “Indiana Irish Wars” typically identifies religion as the chief agitating agent in the feud between the Corkonians and Fardowns, placing the riot on the Wabash and Erie as transplanted religious sectarianism. In such accounts, scholars designate Corkonians as Catholics and Fardowns assume the role of Protestants, acting out Ireland’s religious quarrels on American soil.<sup>5</sup> A typical representative example of this interpretation is William W. Giffin’s summary in *The Irish: Peopling Indiana*: “The Fardowns were Protestants of Scottish ancestry who had emigrated from Ulster in Northern Ireland. The Corkonians were Catholic emigrants from Ireland.”<sup>6</sup>

On the surface, Giffin and other scholars reach a logical conclusion in designating religion as the cause for Indiana’s Corkonian and Fardown feuds. Catholics and Protestants frequently quarreled in nineteenth-century Ireland. Ulster, the northernmost of Ireland’s four provinces, consists of nine counties, six of which today comprise the Protestant-majority Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom. Irish emigration from Ulster during the period of the Corkonian and Fardown feuds usually meant Protestant

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<sup>5</sup> The first example interjecting Catholic and Protestant designations to the Corkonians and Fardowns occurs in Logan J. Esarey’s *Internal Improvements in Early Indiana* (Indianapolis: Edward J. Hecker, 1912), 94-95. A sample of subsequent studies that repeat this conclusion include Frederika V. VanBuskirk, *The Wabash and Erie Canal 1832-1876* (Wabash, IN: Wabash County Historical Society, 1965), 10; Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era, 1828-1855* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1969), 62; Linda Robertson, ed., *Wabash County History Bicentennial Edition* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing, 1976), 476; Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1978), 69; Thomas E. Castaldi, *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook III, Wabash and Miami Counties* (Fort Wayne, IN: Parrot Printing, 2004), 49-50; and William W. Giffin, *The Irish: Peopling Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2006), 24.

<sup>6</sup> William W. Giffin, *The Irish: Peopling Indiana*, 24.

emigrants. However, Giffin and others concluding that Fardowns were Protestants from Ulster offer little or no evidence to support the claim. No known primary sources indicate that Ulster was the area from which the Fardowns migrated to Indiana. The idea of hundreds of Irish Protestants working on canals and railroads in numbers large enough to rival Irish Catholics also defies commonly accepted patterns. Historical evidence suggests that Ulster Protestants more commonly became farmers in Canada or the western states.<sup>7</sup>

Indiana was not the only place to experience Corkonian vs. Fardown fights, battles, and riots. Contemporary newspapers report that groups identified as Corkonians and Fardowns fought on multiple canal and railroad construction sites throughout the United States and Canada during the same era. While Indiana newspapers fail to mention the specific areas of Irish origin for the participants, reports of feuding in other states regularly note the origins of the participants. These reports indicate that the Corkonians came from County Cork (or more generally the Province of Munster), while the Fardowns have origins in a pocket of central Ireland extending from County Longford to the provinces of Connacht (sometimes Anglicized as “Connaught”) and Leinster (see map on page 52).<sup>8</sup>

Without contradictory evidence in the case of Indiana’s Irish Wars, there is no reason to suspect the participants came from areas other than the Munster, Leinster, and

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<sup>7</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> As a representative sample, three examples include “Riots on the Line of the Canal,” (*Washington, D.C.) Daily National Intelligencer*, 29 January 1834, in Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers (NCUSNP) [database on-line], Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; accessed 25 April 2009, indicating Fardowns involved in riots on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal hailed from County Longford. “Riotous Proceedings of the Irish at St. Catherines,” *New-York Spectator*, 20 July 1842, NCUSNP, suggests that the Corkonians fought Fardowns from Connacht on a Canadian canal. Henry S. Beebe, *History of Peru, Illinois* (Peru, IL: J.F. Linton, 1858), 137, notes that Fardowns feuding on Illinois canals in 1838 came from County Longford and the Province of Leinster.

Connacht provinces reported elsewhere. Analyzing the Indiana episodes within the larger context of the feud throughout North America suggests Fardowns came from parts of Ireland associated with Catholic emigration. Of the four Irish provinces, only Ulster held a Protestant majority while the other three were predominantly Catholic. The era of Corkonian and Fardown disturbances, beginning in earnest in the 1830s, coincides with patterns of increasing migration from Connacht, Leinster, and Munster. Historian Timothy J. Meagher notes that in the 1820s and 1830s “migration fever began to spread south into northern Leinster and northern Connaught counties . . . [and] specific parts of Munster, the southwestern province, particularly County Cork.”<sup>9</sup>

Whether the participants in Corkonian and Fardown feuds in Indiana hailed from County Cork and the Province of Munster, or County Longford and the provinces of Leinster or Connacht, all were likely Catholic. The counties of Cork and Longford, for example, experienced moderate to heavy emigration prior to 1845, but neither area was associated with significant Protestant emigration during this period (see map on page 53). Catherine Tobin’s study of “Information Wanted” notices posted for canal laborers in 1830s and 1840s newspapers confirms that the majority of Irish canal laborers came from areas in or near the predominantly Catholic provinces of Connacht and Munster.<sup>10</sup> In one recorded instance, a priest persuaded members of both the Corkonians and the Fardowns warring on the Illinois and Michigan Canal in Illinois to cease hostilities temporarily in order to attend Catholic mass together, a virtual impossibility had Fardowns been

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy J. Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 63-68. Tobin tracked the origins of sixty-three canal workers in the 1830s and 1840s based on “Information Wanted” notices in New York’s *Truth Teller* and the *Boston Pilot*, both Catholic newspapers of the time, finding that 50 percent came from the province of Munster. The majority of the other half came from Connacht or Leinster counties bordering Connacht. Although Tobin’s sample size is small, the results provide evidence that canal workers came predominantly from areas outside Ulster and thus were likely Catholic.

Protestant.<sup>11</sup> Despite the long-held assertions of Indiana historians to the contrary, both Corkonians and Fardowns were predominantly Catholic and their rivalry centered on factors other than religious differences.

While the name “Corkonians” clearly derives from County Cork, the origin of the term “Fardowns” is not as clear. Multiple variations are found in contemporary accounts of their exploits, including “Fardowners,” “Fardouns,” “Fardonians,” “Fardownians,” and “Fardows.” The editors of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* hypothesize that the term “probably” refers to “County Down in Northern Ireland.”<sup>12</sup> A second conjecture recognizes the Connacht and Leinster roots of the Fardowns. According to Irish legend, a group known as the *Fir Domnann* existed as a pre-Celtic tribe living in Connacht and to a lesser extent Leinster.<sup>13</sup> “Fardowns” may be a corruption of the Irish term *Fir Domnann*, with the Irish using a form of this term to reference those from Connacht and Leinster in homage to the legends. The most likely explanation comes from Andrew Leary O’Brien, a native of Cork yet unaffiliated with the Corkonians, who worked briefly as a stonemason in 1838 near Muddy Creek, Pennsylvania. O’Brien recorded in his journal on “one contract they were all Fardowns (that is from the lower counties of Ireland). The next contract was worked by Corconians [sic], that is people from County Cork & the adjoining counties.”<sup>14</sup> Confusion naturally arises when applying the term “far down” counter intuitively to those from Ireland’s northern regions. However, O’Brien’s inference that Fardowns came from “lower counties” is useful when understanding that

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>12</sup> Frederic Gomes Cassidy and Joan Houston Hall, *Dictionary of American Regional English* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1985), 357.

<sup>13</sup> John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 750.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Leary O’Brien, *The Journal of Andrew Leary O’Brien* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1946), 30.



the south of Ireland (and the province of Munster in particular) is the more mountainous region of Ireland. Thus labeling someone as “far down” infers being “far down” the mountains and hills.

More important than the origins of the term “Fardown” is the animosity existing between inhabitants of different regions of Ireland inferred by the term’s usage. Corkonians likely applied the “Fardown” moniker derogatorily to laborers from Leinster or Connacht, with the term later co-opted by newspapers and possibly the Fardowns themselves. “Fardown” was not part of the common vernacular on the North American side of the Atlantic before the 1830s, but the following sources reveal the divide suggested by the term’s usage.

The editors of the *New York Morning Herald* were initially at a loss to explain the term “Fardown” after the two factions made headlines for a riot during the construction of the Croton Water Works in 1838. At first, the editors poked fun at the names, asking, “What is a Corkonian, Brady? A man with a cork leg! What is a Fardownian? A man so far down in the world that everyone tramples on him.”<sup>15</sup> Several days later the editors claimed to have received “a dozen communications” seeking the meaning of the term, in this case referred to as “Fardonian.”<sup>16</sup> After asking around and finding little satisfaction, the editors turned to their readers to solve the mystery. “We know of no place in Ireland—no society—no sect—no locality, whence the name could emanate. Brady does not know—Finn doesn’t know—O’Haggerty doesn’t know—how, then, can we be expected to know? Give us light on the subject, somebody.”<sup>17</sup> The readers responded quickly; one day after first posing the question, the editors posted a brief summary of

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<sup>15</sup> *New York Morning Herald*, 5 May 1838, NCUSNP.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Morning Herald*, 8 May 1838, NCUSNP.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

what they learned. “‘Fardonian’ is a corruption of ‘Fardownian.’ The people of the south of Ireland apply that term to those in the north of Ireland; and they love each other as Satan loves holy water.”<sup>18</sup>

Later the same week, the editors published a letter, signed as being only from “An Irishman,” shedding further light on the term. The letter writer noted that the rivalry between those from the north and south of Ireland was comparable to regional rivalries in the United States, such as those between “Bostonians, Down-Easters, Yorkers, and Yankees, all striving to excel each other in learning activity, and the fine arts; —so it was in Ireland in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>19</sup> The letter further stated that the term “Fardowns” was used by residents of other regions of Ireland to describe those living in the north, “which was far down as it were.”<sup>20</sup> The origins of the term dated to the ninth century when County Armagh, a county in Ireland’s Ulster province, reigned as a seat of knowledge and education, a place where the Irish and people from other nations sent their brightest pupils. This exalted reputation reportedly caused jealousies in other corners of Ireland. According to the letter writer, the term “fardown” evolved as a “general insult; and I am sorry to say that they [Irish immigrants] carry with them from the other side of the water, that provincial spleen which causes many a direful catastrophe in the land of their adoption.”<sup>21</sup> George W. Potter in *To the Golden Door: The Story of the Irish in Ireland and America* echoes this explanation of the origins of the term Fardowns. Potter does not cite the source of his statements yet he essentially recites the contents of the letter

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<sup>18</sup> *New York Morning Herald*, 9 May 1838. NCUSNP.

<sup>19</sup> *New York Morning Herald*, 10 May 1838. NCUSNP.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

received by the *New York Morning Herald*.<sup>22</sup> Matthew E. Mason's study of Irish immigrant trackmen feuds on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad cites Potter's explanation.<sup>23</sup>

Other sources point to additional explanations behind the Corkonian and Fardown rift beyond jealousy over the north's role as the epicenter of Irish education. Andrew Leary O'Brien recorded his understanding of the origin after working alongside the warring parties in Pennsylvania:

The only cause for enmity which I could discover was an old spleen which the lower counties [Fardowns] of Ireland entertained against the Kerry militia for some lack in sustaining the bravery of an Irish militia in the Battles of the Irish Revolution, & though the militia of County Kerry were only in fault, all the southwestern counties were included in the spleen.<sup>24</sup>

O'Brien's interpretation of the reasons behind Corkonian and Fardown feuds further weakens the argument that religious differences were at the core of the animosity. O'Brien's reference to the "Battles of the Irish Revolution" likely refers to the Irish Rebellion of 1798 or a smaller rebellion staged in 1803. The specific instance leading to Fardown animosity towards the Kerry militia is unknown. However, during the 1798 revolution a perception existed that residents of Kerry's fellow Munster counties of Cork and Tipperary were slow to answer calls to combat, inhibited by "zealous magistrates and conciliatory Catholic gentry."<sup>25</sup>

Yet another possible explanation as to the origins of the animosity between Corkonians and Fardowns points to economic factors. A reporter investigating a riot

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<sup>22</sup> George W. Potter, *To the Golden Door: The Story of the Irish in Ireland and America* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1960), 328n.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew E. Mason, "'The Hands Here are Disposed to be Turbulent': Unrest Among the Irish Trackmen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad," *Labor History* 39 (August 1998), 262n.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Leary O'Brien, *The Journal of Andrew Leary O'Brien*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel J. Gahan, *Rebellion: Ireland in 1798* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1997), 42.

between the two factions in New Jersey in 1852 noted that the feud had nothing to do with “persecution for religion’s sake” as both groups were “composed entirely of Catholics, as the great mass of Irish laborers belong to this church.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, the reporter alleges that the “Corkonians come chiefly from the Province of Munster . . . . The term ‘Fardowner’ has been applied by them [Corkonians] to the laborers inhabiting the Province of Connaught and the skirts of Ulster.”<sup>27</sup> The reporter also stated that the feud stemmed from the days when Fardown laborers sought work in Munster during harvest season at wages that undercut the local labor pool. As a result, the Corkonians “have always viewed the ‘Fardowners’ with jealous and contemptuous eyes.”<sup>28</sup> Most telling in this account is the reporter’s phrase that Fardowns came from “Connaught and the skirts of Ulster,” which suggests a predominantly Catholic workforce and echoes the findings of Catherine Tobin’s study of Irish canal workers’ origins indicating Connacht or border counties lying on the edge of Ulster.<sup>29</sup>

Scholars of Irish immigration tend to describe two great waves of migration to America. The initial wave, as many as 250,000, consisted largely of Irish-Protestants from the Province of Ulster arriving prior to the American Revolution.<sup>30</sup> In this first wave Irish Presbyterians, Protestant dissenters to the Anglican establishment, “comprised the bulk of the Irish exodus in the eighteenth century.”<sup>31</sup> Many of the Ulster born Irish-Protestants had family roots in Scotland prior to their migration and remigration to

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<sup>26</sup> “Terrible Riot in New Jersey,” *New York Herald*, 16 February 1857. NCUSNP.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 63-68.

<sup>30</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Ireland and colonial America. These “Scots-Irish” immigrants comprised the majority of Irish participants in the American Revolution.<sup>32</sup> The second great wave is commonly associated with a series of failed potato crops beginning in 1845, permanently altering the population of Ireland through starvation and emigration. This time, members of Ireland’s Catholic majority made up the majority of the immigrants, so much so that 1.5 million came to the United States and “over 2.1 million Irish—about one-fourth of the island’s pre-famine population—went overseas; more people left Ireland in just eleven years than during the preceding two and one-half centuries.”<sup>33</sup>

Wedged between the pre-Revolution and famine waves, a lesser-studied third wave occurred. Between 1815 and 1834, 400,000 Irish departed for North America. Half arrived in Canada, although many ultimately re-migrated to United States soon after their arrival.<sup>34</sup> The Corkonians and Fardowns arrived during this interim period, representative of a changing demographic pattern as pioneers of the new Irish Catholic movement to North America. By the early 1830s, Irish Catholics came to America in greater numbers than Irish Protestants, encouraged to leave Ireland by a depressed economy, overpopulation, and land policies unfavorable to Catholic peasants.<sup>35</sup> Although the mass exodus of the famine years altered the populations of Ireland and North America for decades afterwards, famine emigration was the culmination of a process of Irish Catholic emigration that started over a decade before the potato crops failed.

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<sup>32</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America, 1760-1820* (Dublin: Mercer Press, 1981), 137.

<sup>33</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 291.

<sup>34</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 212.

<sup>35</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 193-200.

Many factors conspired to encourage Irish emigration in the 1830s. By the 1820s, over two million people lived in what counted as poverty for the times, making Ireland among Europe's poorest countries.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Ireland's population density exceeded that of every other European country, leading to a shortage in available land and a surplus of landless laborers.<sup>37</sup> Land policies unfavorable to laborers and small farmers exacerbated land shortages. In the agricultural-based counties of Ireland such as Cork, the typical land distribution system began with property owners, often absentee, who leased their large holdings to a series of intermediaries. These intermediaries, in turn, rented small plots to Irish peasants, often in exchange for farm labor.<sup>38</sup> As the population increased, the demand for land increased in unison. At the same time, some landlords changed their land use from tillage to the more profitable system of livestock grazing. Livestock grazing reduced available acreage for tenant farming. The increased demand for land resulting from increased population coincided with the change in land use from tillage to grazing, causing rent prices to skyrocket. Property owners and intermediaries could essentially set their own price for rent and evict tenants who failed to meet their demands; the high demand for land ensured a steady stream of new renters from which to choose.<sup>39</sup> For those left landless by this system, emigration became a rational alternative to life in Ireland.

The Irish Catholics who left Ireland in the 1830s with hopes of starting anew in North America faced different challenges than their Protestant predecessors. Irish

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<sup>36</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 17.

<sup>38</sup> James S. Donnelly, Jr., *The Land and People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and Land Question* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 10-21.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, "The Tradition of Violence" in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*, eds. Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 26.

Protestants usually arrived with needed skills or material means which could be used to buy land or start a business in their new location. While some came as indentured servants or struggled financially, Irish Protestants typically became farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, or professionals, often able to duplicate successes they enjoyed in Ireland or achieve greater economic stature in their new country.<sup>40</sup> Ulster Protestants, for example, sought farming opportunities in the frontier or became traders in the seaboard economy.<sup>41</sup> As one artisan who made the journey to North America noted of this era of Protestant Irish migration, the majority of the newcomers came “from the class of employers rather than from the employed.”<sup>42</sup> Irish Protestants represented the middle and upper class of Ireland where “membership in the Irish Protestant community provided distinct economic advantages.”<sup>43</sup>

The immigrants that would later comprise the Corkonians and Fardowns, however, belonged to a different class both in Ireland and in North America. The economic reality remained that the truly destitute Irish could not afford passage to North America, but by the 1830s “*relatively* poor Catholics from the three southern provinces constituted a major proportion of the movement overseas” for the first time.<sup>44</sup> Unskilled laborers or servants made up 60 percent of the Irish that arrived in the 1830s, a drastic increase from the 38 percent reported in these categories in 1825, signaling a clear shift in the demographics of Irish immigrants to North America.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 193-203.

<sup>41</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 47-54.

<sup>42</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 197.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>45</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 198; Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 38.

After enduring the ocean passage to port cities in the United States or Canada, newly arrived pre-famine Irish immigrants needed regular work and the burgeoning canal system developing throughout North America beckoned with ready employment opportunities. The State of New York completed the Erie Canal in 1825. The Erie Canal connected the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean, opening trade routes and expanding commercial exchange between distant markets. Judged an immediate success by New Yorkers and eyed with envy by other states, “the success of the Erie Canal was a stimulus and a challenge to other states that sought to imitate the Erie Canal or outdo New York.”<sup>46</sup> Eastern states were quick to follow suit in trying to duplicate New York’s feat. “Canal Fever” spread to less developed states hoping to boost trade. The frontier state of Ohio started constructing a canal system in the same year the Erie Canal was completed.

Indiana, however, initially responded slowly to public demand for a canal system. For citizens in more remote portions of the state, internal improvements such as canals figured to be essential to their existence and promised an economic boom. Produce and goods from Indiana farms could not efficiently find their way to market without adequate transportation, leaving most Indiana settlers of this period to farm at subsistence levels rather than producing goods for the growing marketplace. Those living in southern Indiana looked to Cincinnati as the principal market, but shipping goods there required slow travel over poor roads.<sup>47</sup> Others wished to send products to the markets in New Orleans or to New York. Governor James Ray didn’t care which direction internal improvements pointed, so long as “the flour, pork, beef, potatoes and productions of our

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<sup>46</sup> Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States 1790-1860* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Logan J. Esarey, *Internal Improvements in Early Indiana*, 74-75; Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 26-28; Charles R. Poinsett, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 23-28.



soil [go] to a good market, with the most expedition and the smallest expense . . . [and] return those articles of merchandise which the people must and will have, in the same manner, is what is wanted.”<sup>48</sup> Citizens hoped internal improvements would reduce shipping costs and encourage additional settlement.<sup>49</sup> Yet despite the public clamor, government action remained confined to debates and arguments over the choice of rail or water and the appropriate routes. While the rest of country scrambled towards construction as a salve for their canal fever, in “depressing contrast to eastern dash, Hoosier canal affairs stood still.”<sup>50</sup>

Indiana leaders bickered over canals for seven years after the Erie’s completion. Finances, geography, and competition from the fledgling railroad industry shelved action by the Hoosier state. It was not until 1832 that the legislature enacted a bill that allowed ground breaking on the Wabash and Erie Canal and a water route to New York.<sup>51</sup> The long-delayed decision to begin construction on a canal awakened something within the state; after initial hesitancy, Indiana committed to statewide internal improvements on a grand scale. In 1834, the state approved an ambitious plan involving multiple canals connecting to the Wabash and Erie in addition to railroads. After missing the first wave of canal mania that swept the nation, Hoosiers made up for their tardiness with fervor. As historian Ralph D. Gray noted, “If Indiana was slow to catch the internal improvements fever, she contracted an unusually severe case of it in the mid-1830s.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ralph Blank, “Early Railroad Building in Indiana” in *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 6, ed. Harlow Lindley (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1919), 124.

<sup>49</sup> Logan J. Esarey, *Internal Improvements in Early Indiana*, 74-75; Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 26-28; Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 23-28.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 48-51; Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 35-37.

<sup>52</sup> Ralph D. Gray, “The Wabash and Erie Canal,” in *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*, ed. Ralph D. Gray (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 122.

Indiana needed an adequate labor supply to complete the construction of the massive internal improvement projects. Native Indiana laborers dug the first sections of the Wabash and Erie but that solution had two major problems. First, Indiana farmers eventually needed to return to their fields during planting and harvest seasons, which made their forays into canal building temporary. This problem was typical of canal construction efforts in other states as “even when there was a supply of native labor available, they had an alarming habit (from the perspective of canal employers) of disappearing to do the harvest during peak construction season.”<sup>53</sup> The second problem was that the shortage of available local laborers drove wages and construction costs upwards.<sup>54</sup>

By 1833, the canal commissioners placed in charge of overseeing the first wave of canal construction reported problems with securing labor for the projects to the Indiana legislature. Advertisements for laborers did not bring enough able bodies to complete the work in a timely manner. The high demand for workers and low supply of laborers conspired to inflate laborers’ wages rapidly. Contractors warned the canal commissioners that wage inflation prevented completing the work within the budget and they threatened to stop working all together.<sup>55</sup> Under such threats, the commissioners reported that they “were reduced to the necessity of seeing the work proceed slowly in its operations, with the moral certainty of a great increase of the ultimate cost of its completion, or adopt such courses as would procure the necessary number of hands.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of the Wabash and Erie Canal, 1833*, 3-4, Indiana Historical Society Pamphlet Collection (IHSPC).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Other states were also busy constructing rail and water passages through their territory during this time, increasing the competition for native and skilled laborers. At least forty major canals were under construction between 1785 and 1850.<sup>57</sup> Faced with labor shortages, canal commissioners in Indiana and elsewhere sought an influx of strong, cheap bodies to perform the work. Without readily available local hands, canal recruiters had little recourse but to seek help from the quickly growing supply of immigrant laborers.

The Indiana canal commissioners had little choice but to seek the employment of the emerging immigrant labor pool located predominately on the East Coast. Wabash and Erie Canal agents traveled to Buffalo and other eastern cities, initially offering \$13 per month to those willing to make passage to Indiana and toil in the wilderness, the cost of travel deducted from the hands' pay. The first group of imported laborers, consisting primarily of German and Irish immigrants and enticed by the lure of regular work, soon followed.<sup>58</sup> The Germans often found employment on the Wabash and Erie as artisans, stonemasons, or carpenters, but the unskilled labor positions "were more often filled by the Irish."<sup>59</sup> Indiana's reliance on Irish immigrants as a cheap source of labor to build canals was typical of the era. Canal labor evolved into a vocation dominated by the Irish, so much so that a popular saying at the time recalled "to dig a canal, at least four things are necessary, a shovel, a pick, a wheelbarrow, and an Irishman."<sup>60</sup>

Irish immigrants of the 1830s were well suited for canal work from a demographic perspective. In the nineteenth-century mind, canal (and railroad) work

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<sup>57</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of the Wabash and Erie Canal, 1833*, 4, IHSPC.

<sup>59</sup> Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 58.

<sup>60</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 42.

required male strength and collections of workers without obligations that prevented them from moving easily between locations. In the twenty-five years before the potato famine, “only about half of the Irish immigrants landing at Boston and New York traveled in family groups.”<sup>61</sup> In this sense, the trailblazers of Irish-Catholic immigration in the United States were exceptional when compared to those coming after the potato famine. Post-famine immigrants in the United States were notable for the fact that more Irish women came to the United States than men, making Ireland one of the few countries that provided a significant immigrant population for which this was true.<sup>62</sup> Prior to the famine, however, the majority of Irish immigrants were young, single, and male. Irish men with families and young children typically chose to go to nearby England rather than endure the arduous journey and unknowns of America.<sup>63</sup> Of canal workers who were married, many left their wives in other cities and traveled alone to work on the canals.<sup>64</sup> Catherine Tobin’s study of nineteenth-century canal workers indicates that the typical internal improvements laborer of the 1830s was under thirty-five years of age, unmarried, and predominantly Catholic (an important distinction given the assumption typically made in Indiana histories that the Corkonians and Fardowns fought over religious differences).<sup>65</sup> The increasing flow of male Irish immigrants, most arriving without family impediments, stood at the ready for deployment to the nation’s canals and railroads. With few viable work alternatives, Irish immigrants in this era formed “a mobile army of cheap, unskilled labor for the American industrial revolution.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>62</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), xiv.

<sup>63</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 70-71.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Pearson Education, 2000), 64.

Few workers willingly chose to participate in the monotonous and backbreaking work of canal construction if other options were available. The regulations for canal construction indicate the intensity of the labor required to carve what amounted to fabricated rivers from the Indiana wilderness. Creating paths at least sixty feet wide required the removal of trees, saplings, bushes, stumps, and roots. Scraps from the clearing the path were moved to a boundary at least twenty feet beyond the canal path, and the canals themselves had to be dug forty feet wide at the surface and twenty-six feet wide at the bottom to a depth of four feet.<sup>67</sup> Laborers on canals cleared streambeds of rocks, sandbars, and dead trees, pulled stumps and roots, and shoveled dirt and rock.<sup>68</sup> Workers completed these tasks without the modern conveniences of bulldozers and backhoes—the tools of the 1830s consisted of “pick, shovel, auger, wheelbarrow, and cart, powered by man, oxen, horses, and gunpowder.”<sup>69</sup> The physical strain came with a significant price for the workers. Injuries to the workforce ranged from common problems such as cuts, bruises, and sore muscles to more significant and crippling results like the loss of limb and life.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to the brutal nature of the physical labor involved, other factors contributed to create an atmosphere of general hostility and agitation among hands on internal improvement sites. Work sites were in remote areas generally precluding social interaction with those not involved on the canal. A newspaper editor remarked of his journey along the Wabash and Erie that the canal passed “through a fine but uncultivated country, with few inhabitants except the Irish ‘abergoins’ [sic] that labor upon the

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<sup>67</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of the Wabash and Erie Canal, 1833*, 16, IHSPC.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

canal.”<sup>71</sup> The shoddy shanty villages populated by canal workers reflected the transient nature of the work and the temporary nature of the housing. In extreme cases, the accommodations “did not differ significantly from those given the horses and oxen.”<sup>72</sup> Living and working in such close quarters made workers easily susceptible to frequent (and sometimes fatal) outbreaks of cholera, malaria, and other illnesses.<sup>73</sup> The fear of epidemic was pervasive to canal construction as attested to by a popular song that arose during the construction of the New Basin Canal in Louisiana:

*Ten thousand Micks, they swung their picks  
To dig the New Canal.  
But the cholera was stronger 'n they  
An' Twice it killed them all.*<sup>74</sup>

Canal work was simply unattractive to those with other choices—the “fear of sickness, insalubrious climate, geographical remoteness, and irregular wage payments deterred many workers from taking up this form of employment.”<sup>75</sup>

If grueling work and poor living conditions did not make Irish laborers sufficiently agitated and hostile, a constant state of drunkenness surely did. Alcohol, particularly whiskey, was readily available in frontier Indiana, and became an essential work-provided benefit to the canal worker. Whiskey provisions served to pacify laborers and provide medicinal relief for malaria and cholera, in addition to ample social consumption.<sup>76</sup> Ledgers from Joseph McClure’s Wabash County general store show that in the same county and in the same month as the riot on the Wabash and Erie Canal, two

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<sup>71</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 120.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 143.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-126.

<sup>74</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish*, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 38-39.

<sup>76</sup> Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 61.

barrels of whiskey cost the same as “one pair [sic] of pantaloons,” making alcohol a relatively cheap and easy way for management to mollify their human capital.<sup>77</sup>

Drunkenness became as common to canal construction as the spade and the axe. One estimate places the alcohol consumption of canal laborers at twelve to twenty ounces of whiskey during the workday, six days a week, in addition to untold ounces consumed after work hours.<sup>78</sup> At least one newspaper at the time noticed the effects of alcohol on the work force. In covering a riot near Sydney, Ohio in 1840, the editors wrote:

The amount of whiskey used on the Canal, and its awful results, is almost incredible. . . . Many of those who resort to the public works to obtain an honest living for themselves and families, full of vigor, activity, and health, after a short time present symptoms of diminished vigor, impaired health, broken constitutions, and soon are cut down “as cumberers of the ground.”<sup>79</sup>

The Wabash and Erie was not immune to the effects of alcoholism among laborers. A canal employee dubbed the “jigger boss” doled out drinks to keep workers pacified. Years later, a former jigger boss recalled of rampant consumption: “You wouldn’t expect them [laborers] to work on the canal if they were sober, would you?”<sup>80</sup> Even priests charged with tending to the souls of their growing flock of Catholic workers grew discouraged and disconsolate at the abuse of distilled spirits. “I have much trouble with my Irish boys on the canal; they will drink,” Father Simon Lalumiere wrote of the workers on the Wabash and Erie, “I am often discouraged with them because they have

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph McClure Ledgers 1829-1861, Folder 1, p.60, Indiana Historical Society Manuscript Collection (IHSMC).

<sup>78</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 183-187.

<sup>79</sup> “Riot on the Canal,” (*Washington, D.C*) *Daily National Intelligencer*, 21 January 1840, NCUSNP.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 58; Charles R. Poinsatte, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 62; Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 184.

no religion, no piety—so much so that sometimes I would be tempted to go to some older country where there is more piety and, consequently, more consolation.”<sup>81</sup>

Many Irish immigrants entering the economy of the 1830s as unskilled laborers soon found themselves condemned to jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder, a rung that undoubtedly included canal labor. The immigrants that comprised the Corkonians and the Fardowns faced economic pressure, harsh labor, social isolation, and transient work opportunities. The insular nature of the predominantly Irish work force also served to reinforce any existing rivalries that immigrants brought with them from their former country. This unique existence proved ripe for anti-social tendencies. Catherine Tobin argues that the work, irregular pay, poor living conditions, and constant threat of injury and death contributed to “an environment that was conducive to the development of frustration, anger, loneliness, the symptoms of an ‘uprooted personality.’”<sup>82</sup> In comparison to other contemporary laborers, historian Peter Way concluded that canal laborers “were more fully exploited, worse off economically, socially fragmented, and, as a result, with a culture (or more accurately, cultures) that reflected their alienation as much as a sense of community.”<sup>83</sup> Add to this mix employer sanctioned alcohol abuse and the collection of workers in the isolated Indiana wilderness became a boiling cauldron producing a stew of discontent.

A notable omission from this introduction is a semblance of expressed unity or shared nationalism among the Irish immigrants who would participate in the Indiana Irish Wars. The commonality of Irish laborers’ shared Catholicism, experiences as

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<sup>81</sup> Father Simon Lalumiere to Reverend A. Martin, 28 March 1848, Folio 1, Box 16, Process Cabinet, Sisters-of-Providence Archives, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, Terre Haute, IN.

<sup>82</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 142.

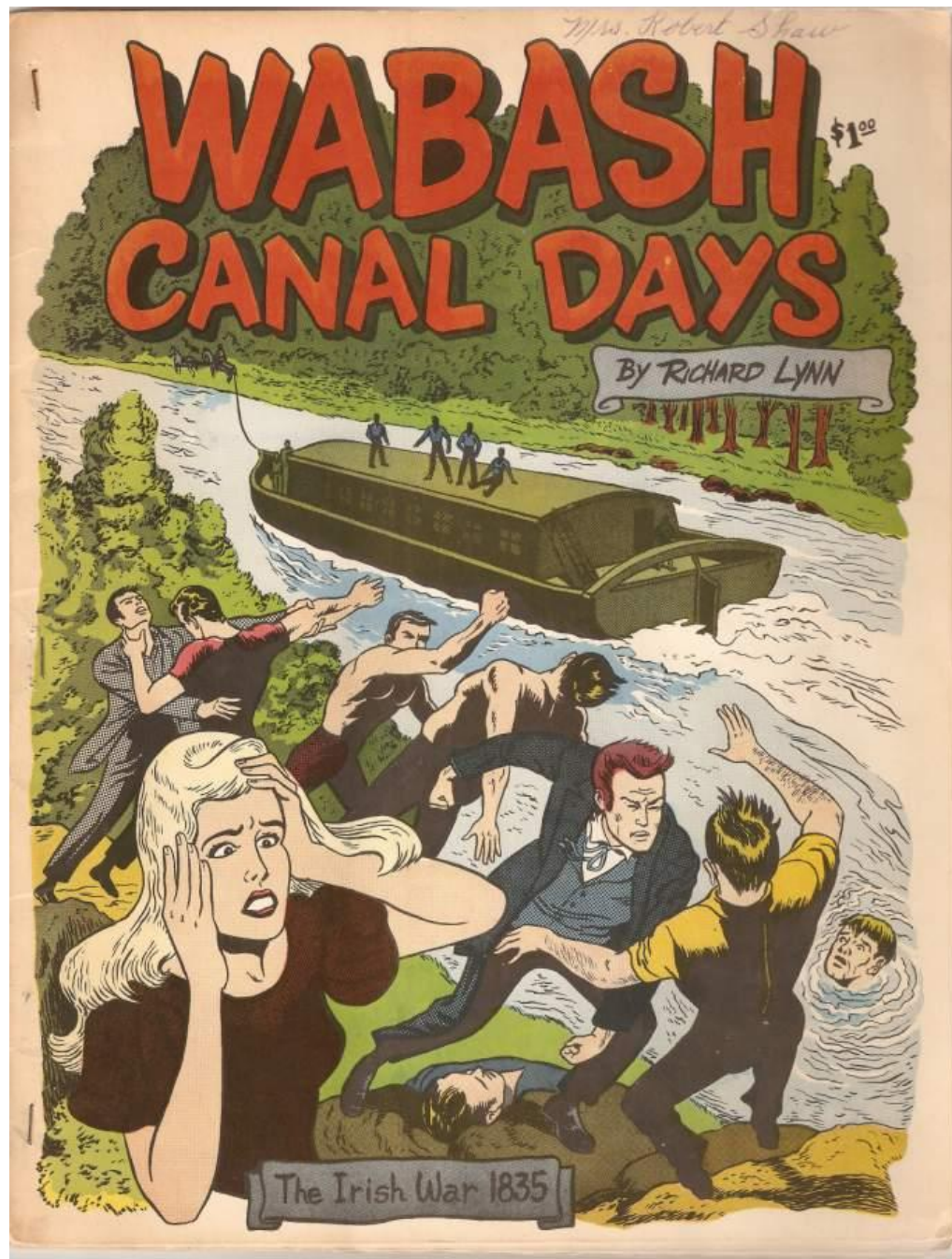
<sup>83</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 6.



immigrants, and the drudgery of toiling on internal improvements did not serve to bind Corkonians and Fardowns together. Other factors, such as the deep-seated rivalry between those from Munster and those from “far down” areas of Ireland superseded any form of collective identity. Reginald Byron’s introduction to his study of Irish-American identity, *Irish America*, summarizes the misconception that Irish immigrants came to North America embracing a single national identity. Byron notes, “It seems nowadays to be assumed that every immigrant from Ireland worthy of being regarded as truly and properly Irish was the embodiment of a distinctive, idealized national culture or ethnic type; . . . And that all left Ireland against their will.”<sup>84</sup> Understanding why this “distinctive, idealized national culture” remained absent among Irish laborers in 1830s Indiana is paramount in understanding the motivations of Corkonians and Fardowns. The following chapter will address this point as it explains the transformation of agrarian-based peasant secret societies in Ireland into laborer-based secret societies of Irish immigrants in Indiana.

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<sup>84</sup> Reginald Byron, *Irish America* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1.



**Figure 1:** A program cover from the 1962 City of Wabash Canal Days festival featuring an artist's depiction of the 1835 riot on the Wabash and Erie Canal (from the collections of the Wabash County Historical Museum).

**CHAPTER II**  
**TRANSATLANTIC LEGACIES:**  
**THE IMPORTED CULTURE OF CORKONIANS AND FARDOWNS**

The Irish birth of the participants in the Indiana Irish Wars adds more to the story than an ethnic identifier; it is central to understanding the nature of the conflict. The roots of the Corkonian and Fardown feud extend across the Atlantic Ocean to Irish culture and peasant traditions. The typical Scots-Irish immigrant arriving before 1830 was a middle-class farmer, artisan, shopkeeper, or professional unlikely to be engaged in canal work; this group of immigrants quickly assimilated to their new surroundings. As the wave of Irish immigration slanted in the favor of Irish Catholics, the assimilation process quickly changed. The Irish Catholics were slower to embrace American culture. Irish Catholic tradition dictated that this new wave of immigrants retain Irish values and culture despite their new surroundings. The different approaches of Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics owe much to the differences in their respective worldviews. Protestants in the first wave of Irish emigration viewed their voyages to North America as the fulfillment of communal goals or biblical prophecy, thereby welcoming emigration in many instances. Catholics typically viewed emigration as a form of political banishment.<sup>1</sup>

Irish Catholics inhabited and exhibited a cultural heritage where emigration, even voluntary emigration, occurred with melancholy. The words of Irish poets record this cultural view of emigration dating at least to the Flight of the Earls in 1607, a landmark moment in Irish history when Gaelic chieftains in the Province of Ulster fled Ireland

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<sup>1</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 168.

under pressure from King James I of England.<sup>2</sup> The popular sentiment remained that emigrants left their homes because of forces outside their control, regardless of the factors precipitating emigration. Irish Catholics viewed themselves not as *emigrants*, willingly striking out for new lands in search of prosperity and security, but instead as *exiles*, banished from their homeland because of political, economic, or religious tyranny. As such, little motivation initially existed for Irish Catholics to adopt the customs of their new North American homes. This exile sentiment among Irish Catholic immigrants has deep roots in the words in the Irish language. As Kerby Miller notes in *Emigrants and Exiles*:

It may be very significant that the Irish language had no equivalent for the English word “emigrant,” with its voluntary and emotional neutral connotations. Rather, the Irish word primarily used to describe one who left Ireland has been *deoraí*, the literal meaning of which is “exile.”<sup>3</sup>

Maintaining Irish traditions and culture once in North America provided the immigrant with comfort and continuity. Because of their retained connection to Irish tradition and culture, Irish immigrant canal laborers and railroad trackmen responded to the stimuli of their work conditions in a manner reminiscent of their Irish heritage. The formation and actions of groups such as the Corkonians and the Fardowns mirror two related but different Irish traditions. The first, “faction fighting,” grew out of ancient rivalries between neighboring families and involved ritualized mass brawls between factions. The second, the formation of violence-prone secret societies, imitated the

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<sup>2</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 103-105. The Flight of the Earls signifies the departure of Hugh O’Neill and Rory O’Connell in 1607 from Ireland. O’Neill and O’Connell (the Earls), pressured into submission by King James I of England, left Ireland hoping to raise an army for an invasion to reclaim their kingdoms. The invasion never materialized and the departure of the Earls signaled the end of the traditional Gaelic ruling clans in Ulster.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Whiteboy and Ribbon secret society movements that gripped Ireland during various periods of the 1700s and 1800s as a response to religious and economic distress.

An American correspondent visiting Ireland in 1835 wrote of the people he encountered, “There is a disease in the character of the Irish people, and I can’t make out what it is. They are not so very ignorant...but they seem to have such an innate love of rows, that there is no taming them.”<sup>4</sup> This reputation for lawlessness grew in part out of the history of faction fighting. Such fights involved groups of men numbering from 100 to over 1,000, organized along kinship lines, engaging in prearranged combat at fairs, markets, and festivals. Faction fights were a common sight at public gatherings where participants armed with clubs and firearms battled for clan supremacy. Women usually aided men during these melees by supplying ammunition and offering verbal encouragement. Deaths, while rare, were an occasional byproduct of the altercations. British authorities made few efforts to stop faction fighting as the phenomenon generally remained confined to assaults only on members of the differing clans, thus posing little direct threat to British supremacy.<sup>5</sup>

Carolyn Conley observes in her study of nineteenth-century Irish fighting that the Irish sometimes used violence as a reaction to negative stimulus, but also deliberately chose violence as a pastime or as a form of entertainment.<sup>6</sup> To some extent, Conley’s analysis is accurate. However, faction fighting accumulated traits that made the phenomenon more complex than a mere cure for boredom. The origins of the faction

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<sup>4</sup> “Brooks’ Letter,” *Indiana (Indianapolis) Journal*, 13 November 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas N. Brown, “Nationalism and the Irish Peasant, 1800-1848,” *Review of Politics* 15 (October 1953), 405; Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 60-61; Paul E.W. Roberts, “Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and Faction Fighting in East Munster, 1802-11” in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*, eds. Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 65-66.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Conley, “The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting,” *Journal of Social History* 33 (Autumn, 1999), 57-60.

conflicts were rooted in the preservation of family honor and vengeance for wrongs incurred during previous encounters that fueled their continuation. Sometimes the rivalries were old enough that the actual origins faded from the collective memory. Conley cites an example of factions known as the Three Year Olds and the Four Year Olds who participated in an ongoing feud in County Limerick. “The names,” Conley wrote, “stemmed from a fight held decades earlier over the age of either a colt or a cow. By 1869 nobody remembered which.”<sup>7</sup> By the nineteenth century, some faction fighting took on economic significance. Collections of small landholders fought cadres of larger farmers and grazers, where control of the land lay at the heart of the battles. In other cases, landlords pitted their tenants against the tenants of a rival to settle wagers or personal scores.<sup>8</sup>

British papers frequently reported on faction fights, professing outrage and indignation at the riotous behavior of the Irish. The village of Ballingarry in County Limerick (a border county to Cork) witnessed intense faction fighting between groups called the Shanavests and the Caravats in 1833. A Belfast newspaper reporting on one such incident described the affair as “a scene which human nature would shudder to contemplate.”<sup>9</sup> The factions met at the fair in Ballingarry, where one side gathered at the cross of the village and the other on the green. Each side awaited a predetermined signal to start the hostilities. When the signal was given, “dense showers of stones and other missiles literally blackened the air, and many unfortunate wretches were severely

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>8</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 60-61.

<sup>9</sup> “Faction Fight,” *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 November 1833, in Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers (NCBLN) [database on-line], Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; accessed 25 April 2009.

wounded.”<sup>10</sup> The Shanavests continued to fire at their opponents, pursuing the Caravats even as they retreated. When the dust finally settled on the Ballingarry brawl, the town’s inhabitants assumed that peace would return. Nevertheless, the rivalry flared up the very next evening when the “scene was renewed—shots fired in all directions—to the terror of the peaceable inhabitants.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1834, an old feud between factions known as the Lawlors and Cooleens reared its head. The two factions had feuded for fifty years before gathering 1,000 strong at the conclusion of the races at Ballyhea (near the city of Cork). The factions summarily ignored soldiers responding to the scene, even after government forces read the Riot Act to the participants.<sup>12</sup> Using sticks and stones and aided by women gathering ammunition in their aprons, the Lawlors drove their opponents into a nearby river where twelve Cooleens drowned. The Lawlors pelted the Cooleens with rocks from the shore as their adversaries struggled through the water. The authorities arrested twenty participants.<sup>13</sup> Newspaper accounts at the time stated, “No other reason can be assigned even by the persons connected with those factions for the hostility they bear each other, save that it has existed for over half a century.”<sup>14</sup>

Faction fighting evolved into agrarian or peasant based secret societies that used violence and the threat of violence to redress economic grievances. Where faction fighting called for ritualized violence and provided a “cathartic release of tensions,” the secret societies required organizational loyalty oaths and a “close identification with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The Riot Act banned unlawful congregations. A requirement of the Act dictated that it be read to congregants before being enforced, hence the common modern phrase to “read the riot act.”

<sup>13</sup> “Dreadful Affray,” *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 July 1834, NCBLNP; “Faction Fight,” *Derby Mercury*, 16 July 1834, NCBLNP.

<sup>14</sup> “Dreadful Affray,” *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 July 1834, NCBLNP.

aspirations and interests of the social class which spawned them.”<sup>15</sup> Many factors precipitated the emergence of the peasant secret societies. During the early nineteenth century, recessions and an evolving economy forced Irish landowners, many of whom were absentee, to tighten the management of their properties. Under the Irish land system, the peasantry remained confined to roles of small farmers, cottiers (who received a few acres of land for personal use in exchange for farm labor), farm laborers, and migratory laborers.<sup>16</sup> The rapid growth in population, increasing from 2.5 million in 1753 to 6.8 million by 1821, coupled with land shortages to inflate rent prices.<sup>17</sup> Exploitive landlords set their price for rent and evicted tenants failing to meet their demands; the high demand for land ensured a steady stream of new renters from which to choose. The Irish peasants’ long tradition of communal farming came under threat from the practice of livestock grazing, displacing many. Many of the same factors that encouraged emigration also encouraged the peasants that remained to find methods to protect themselves from economic instability.

With few available options to combat landlord policies and evictions, Irish peasants formed secret societies that rebelled against the system with the objective of preserving land use and work opportunities for those in their own kin network, community, and organization. The secret societies used violence in an attempt to impart control on their economic sphere. The secret societies attacked property owners, British troops, unsympathetic clergy, new tenants who took over the land of displaced members, and interloping laborers from surrounding areas in order to protect their meager interests.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and Their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 71.

<sup>16</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, “The Tradition of Violence” in *Irish Peasants*, 26.



Outlaws to the establishment and heroes to the peasantry, societies such as the Whiteboys (so called because of the white shirts they wore so as to be more readily visible in the dark of night) emerged as champions of the oppressed.<sup>18</sup>

While nearly every county in Ireland experienced some form of secret society uprising, certain parts of Ireland were more prone to their existence. The secret societies rarely ran in perpetuity, the common practice included rising up in a specific location in opposition to threats to their members, disappearing into the countryside as the threats subsided, and rising again when the threats resumed. In some locations, however, the specter of the societies remained constant. Gale Christianson notes that the “societies appear to have had an almost continuous existence in the counties of Limerick, Louth, Westmeath, Tipperary, Clare, and Kildare from the 1780s and 1790s to the late 1840s.”<sup>19</sup> The most infamous of these secret societies, the Whiteboys, operated most successfully in the Province of Munster. The geography of the secret societies is important; the Province of Munster, which includes the aforementioned counties of Limerick, Tipperary, and Clare, also includes the county and city of Cork. Participants in the melees on internal improvement projects in Indiana and elsewhere who fought under the banner of the Corkonians, whether they actually hailed from County Cork or counties surrounding Cork, undoubtedly had either participated in similar secret societies in Ireland or at the very least been exposed to their methods.

The Whiteboys were not the only secret society operating at this time in Ireland. A closely related movement, the Ribbon Men, also flourished at various times in pre-

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<sup>18</sup> Maureen Wall, “The Whiteboys” in *Secret Societies in Ireland*, ed. T. Desmond Williams (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1973), 13-16.

<sup>19</sup> Gale E. Christianson, “Secret Societies and Agrarian Violence in Ireland, 1790-1840,” *Agricultural History* 46 (July 1972), 369.

famine Ireland. The Ribbon Men had roots in religious sectarianism having formed in Ulster as a Catholic response to attacks from Protestant secret societies and religious oppression. Despite these beginnings, more pressing economic issues supplanted religion at the heart of Ribbon motivations. Historian Joseph Lee argues that although religion played a part in the in the origins of the Ribbon movement, disputes over land became the Ribbon Men's primary concern.<sup>20</sup> Land and economic issues intertwined with Ribbon actions so "that the term 'Ribbonism' soon came to be applied generically to all agrarian unrest."<sup>21</sup>

The periods of most frequent Ribbon activity coincided with periods of great economic turbulence. Outbreaks of Ribbon violence between 1814 and 1816 coincided with grain prices falling, resulting in tenants unable to meet rent prices. A Ribbon outbreak from 1821-23 occurred simultaneously with a drop in grain prices coupled with poor potato crops. Rather than pitting Catholics against Protestants, most Ribbon disturbances pitted laborers against farmers who sought to turn tillage land into grazing plots for cattle and sheep.<sup>22</sup> Just as the Whiteboy movements influenced the Corkonians on North American internal improvement sites, the Ribbon Men influenced the Fardowns.

Other Irish secret societies with similarly exotic sounding names flourished in the Irish countryside. The Oakboys, Houghers, Rightboys, Rockites, Defenders, Threshers, and Terry Alts, to name but a few, all had periods of uprising. Some had affiliations with the Whiteboys or Ribbon Men while others were independent. Yet the terms

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Lee, "The Ribbonmen," in *Secret Societies in Ireland*, ed. Desmond T. Williams (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1973), 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-29.

“Whiteboys” and “Whiteboyism” and “Ribbon Men” and “Ribbonism” became commonly accepted and pervasive to reference all secret society actions involving Irish Catholics. In the areas of Ireland where Ribbonism and Whiteboyism flourished, participation in such organizations became an accepted tradition. The secret societies adopted customary features, including uniforms or identifying dress, oaths of loyalty, secret handshakes, and secret codes.

Typical tactics of the Whiteboy and Ribbon societies involved using terror and violence to obtain their objectives. An example may include a scenario in which “a farmer who employed a laborer from outside the district would be directed by night visitors to discharge him. If this was refused, a bit of burning turf might be thrust into the thatch of the farmer’s cottage or he might be seriously beaten.”<sup>23</sup> In extreme cases, landowners and/or laborers arriving from other districts in search of work were murdered. Notes left at the scene by the societies and signed by a pseudonym served as warning to others.<sup>24</sup>

There were several ways in which membership in Whiteboy and Ribbon societies perpetuated. Peasants sometimes sought out the societies in desperate attempts to stave off displacement from their land. In other situations, the Whiteboys and Ribbon Men sought out members with their own uniquely styled recruitment drive, demanding participation from the locals and meting out punishment to those that refused to join their bands. A correspondent from a Dublin newspaper in 1820 reported on recruitment tactics in County Galway, a county in the Fardown associated Province of Connacht. The

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas N. Brown, “Nationalism and the Irish Peasant, 1800-1848,” 427.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power*, chapter 2 passim; Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, “The Tradition of Violence,” in *Irish Peasants*, 25; Paul E.W. Roberts, “Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and Faction Fighting in East Munster, 1802-11,” in *Irish Peasants*, 66-70.

correspondent reported that Ribbon Men appeared at peasant homes, summoned inhabitants by shouting, “Come forth, man of the house,” and broke down doors of those that failed to respond.<sup>25</sup> The Ribbon Men forced the males to swear allegiance to their cause, gave out instructions for a future midnight meeting, and threatened their new recruits with death should they fail to show at the designated time and location or inform the authorities. Each recruited man placed a small monetary offering into a fund for the use of the Ribbon Men and proceeded to swear in other men in their district.<sup>26</sup> There is evidence that similar tactics, designed to enforce a closed-shop system, occurred with Irish secret societies in North America. In 1835 near Utica, New York, laborers from Connacht attacked Corkonians but only after two men “went through and administered an oath to all the Connaughtmen for some distance on the line, binding them to the conspiracy.”<sup>27</sup> Although Whiteboys, Ribbon Men, Corkonians, and Fardowns receive the “secret society” label, they were “secret” only in that open admission of membership resulted in penalties from the authorities; their actions often occurred in very public ways.

The Province of Munster existed in a near constant state of labor and peasant unrest in the fifteen years prior to the Corkonians and Fardowns arriving in Indiana. Contemporary newspaper reports reflect the pattern of violence. In Limerick in 1820, a labor dispute resulted in “a gang of ruffians” ransacking the house of a rival cooper. Failing to find the object of their anger, the assailants beat their antagonist’s wife, broke his windows, and destroyed all of his furniture.<sup>28</sup> In 1822, secret societies plundered ten

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<sup>25</sup> “County Galway,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), 3 February 1820, NCBLNP.

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

<sup>27</sup> “From the Oneida Whig,” *New-York Spectator*, 7 September 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>28</sup> “Provincial Intelligence,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), 16 February 1820, NCBLNP.

houses in Rathkeale (County Limerick), murdered a man named Gormans, and severely wounded his elderly father.<sup>29</sup>

By 1829, secret societies plagued Cork to the point that the government created a special commission to investigate the problem. The commission focused on a series of assassination attempts perpetrated by the local Whiteboy organization. The testimony indicated that the Whiteboys conducted their business in Cork within the shadows of local taverns. According to historian George Potter, the Corkonians and the Fardowns operated in much the same way. Potter found that “in New York, as in Ireland, the directing heads were said to be saloonkeepers.”<sup>30</sup> The Cork testimony also suggested that the local Whiteboy organization included a committee of leaders who administered membership oaths and selected targets for their aggression. As one defendant noted, “Nothing can be done in Whiteboy business without their [the committee] consent.”<sup>31</sup> Among the targets selected by the Cork Whiteboys was a Dr. Norcutt whom the Whiteboys struck while he accompanied his daughter and servants on a countryside carriage ride. The testimony to the special commission shocked those unfamiliar with the Whiteboys’ resolve. One defendant testified. “I would have shot the young lady in the carriage—I would not spare her,” eliciting a “thrill of horror” through the crowded courtroom.<sup>32</sup> A second defendant declared he “might have attacked five hundred homes” during his time as a Whiteboy.<sup>33</sup>

The forebears of the North American Corkonians were not alone in creating hysteria among the British and the landed gentry with their actions. Ribbon activity in

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<sup>29</sup> “Disturbed Districts,” *Morning Chronicle* (London), 1 March 1822, NCBLNP.

<sup>30</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 327.

<sup>31</sup> “Cork Special Commission,” *Morning Chronicle* (London), 31 October 1829, NCBLNP.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

the areas of Ireland associated with the Fardowns also tantalized newspaper readers. One example involving a Ribbon Men attack in Roscommon (a county in Connacht bordering County Longford) in which “a party of Ribbonmen entered a house, and tortured the owner of it in the most atrocious manner” was extolled in a London paper as “shocking cruelty.”<sup>34</sup>

Reports of Whiteboy and Ribbon activity even found homes across the pond in American newspapers where the Yankee press loved printing sensational news. The *New-York Spectator* reported on a special commission appointed to investigate secret societies in the Munster counties of Limerick and Claire in 1831. The paper cited the instructions given to the Limerick grand jury in describing secret society actions as consisting of “every species of crime, accompanied by violence” in achieving their goals.<sup>35</sup> The editors echoed their British counterparts in noting that the “moral disease which has stricken the peasantry of Ireland increases from year to year in violence and malignity.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet not all contemporary observers condemned the Irish peasants for their actions. The secret societies would not have survived if they were without support from some quarter. The Whiteboy and Ribbon movements found cheerleaders among those opposed to British or landlord policies that contributed to agrarian unrest. The peasantry, if not members of such organizations, sympathized with their actions, offering support and shelter.<sup>37</sup> An 1831 letter written to a Dublin newspaper exemplifies this support, shifting the blame for outbreaks of violence from the secret societies to Great Britain. The

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<sup>34</sup> “Police,” *Morning Chronicle* (London), 6 January 1820, NCBLNP.

<sup>35</sup> *New-York Spectator*, 5 August 1831, NCUSNP.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 93-96.

supporter claimed the “Whiteboys, the Peep of-day Boys, the Steel boys, the Captain Rocks, and the Terry Alts, are all the progeny of bad laws” and the absence of “good laws.”<sup>38</sup> The secret societies acted from being “reduced to want and destitution, either by the impossibility of getting employment, the visitation of disease, or old age, or all the countless ills to which our nature is subject.”<sup>39</sup>

Ireland seemed to exist in intermittent states of civil war by 1833. Unlike traditional concepts of such wars, the battle lines were blurred and changing. Peasants fought the government, property owners, and other peasants over work opportunities and land. To the casual observer, Ireland must have seemed to be nearly ungovernable.

The pervasiveness of secret society uprisings caught the attention of Daniel O’Connell, among Ireland’s best-known and beloved politicians, and certainly the most famous and visible politician of his era. O’Connell worked tirelessly to achieve Catholic Emancipation, a cause that included, among other issues, easing restrictions on Catholic land ownership and the holding of public office, and the abolition of the forced tithing of Catholics to the government-ordained Anglican Church. By the early 1830s, O’Connell turned his attention to self-government for Ireland, the Irish Home Rule movement. O’Connell viewed secret societies as a hindrance to the Home Rule effort and he urged the public in an 1833 address to the Irish people to remove the barrier of secret societies from the Home Rule mission. He suggested that opponents of Home Rule actually encouraged secret society violence because the lawlessness of the movements showed Ireland’s inability to govern itself. O’Connell claimed, “our enemies are now using the

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<sup>38</sup> “To P. Lavelle, Esq.,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin), 18 May 1831, NCBLNP.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

most active means, and the most base—I should call them the most diabolical contrivances, to ensnare the people into the commission of crimes.”<sup>40</sup>

O’Connell pleaded with the peasant societies to cease their operations in deference to the Home Rule cause. “Nothing can prevent the restoration of the Irish Parliament,” O’Connell said, “except the follies & crimes of the Irish people themselves.”<sup>41</sup> O’Connell explained that secret society violence would not result in justice for the peasants, that destruction of property and murder ultimately ended in “heavy taxes, severe punishments, imprisonments, transpiration, & death.”<sup>42</sup> The pull of the secret society tradition proved more powerful than the desire for Home Rule. O’Connell ultimately failed to achieve his Home Rule goal in his lifetime, and secret societies continue to flourish in Ireland.

A French consul visiting Ireland in 1782 remarked, “The Irish themselves, from different parts of the kingdom are very different. It is difficult to account for this surprising localization. One would think, on so small an island, an Irishman would be an Irishman, yet it is not so: . . .”<sup>43</sup> Irish Catholic immigrants of the 1830s exhibited cultural unity in bringing their “exile” tradition to North America, but they failed to bring a uniform vision of what constituted being “Irish.” The typical Irish Catholic immigrant of this period is difficult to classify in terms of his/her national identity. While undoubtedly viewing themselves as “Irish,” the definition of what constituted “being Irish” differed with each immigrant. A history of tribalism existed in Ireland rather than a history of

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel O’Connell, “Mr. O’Connell’s Address to the People of Ireland,” *Morning Chronicle* (London), 21 January 1833, NCBLNP.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 11.



unified political institutions. Before colonization by Great Britain, Irish chieftains lorded over small kingdoms. Each chieftain, in turn, pledged allegiance to a king that ruled a wider geographic area. A High King of Ireland theoretically ruled over all of the lesser kings, although the consistent inability to agree upon the acceptance of one High King made the title more figurative than actually applied.<sup>44</sup> In 800 A.D., Norse Vikings began making regular incursions to the Ireland, eventually establishing permanent settlements and integrating with Irish society, creating another layer to the already complicated sense of national identity. The arrival in 1169 of the Normans, colonization by Great Britain, and the 1800 Act of Union that made Ireland a part of the United Kingdom added further obstacles to definitions of “Irishness.”

The 1830s Irish Catholic immigrant shared a religion and a strong attachment to Ireland, but they did not necessarily share an attachment to each other. While nationalist movements had appeared and failed in Ireland (most notably the 1798 rebellion spearheaded by a group known as the United Irishmen), the ties to kinship networks and the prevalence of local concerns exceeded Irish peasant ties to nationalist movements. Defined concepts of Irish nationalism were still embryonic in the 1830s, and the Irish who arrived on American shores during this decade “were by no means a fully defined national community.”<sup>45</sup>

The Irish, clinging to the traditions of the old country, organized themselves socially according to kinship and geographic ties after arriving in America. They lived among their own, often recreating as best they could their home Irish villages. In his

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<sup>44</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 5-6; Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 12-13.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Moss, “St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845-1875,” *Journal of Social History* 29 (Autumn 1995), 128. Moss provides a brief but useful historiography of Irish nationalism on pages 127-129.

study of Irish immigrants in Lowell, Massachusetts, Brian Mitchell describes the way in which the Irish imported their fractured sense of community:

Within Irish society, most people had little knowledge of the world beyond the farm neighborhood. The average Irishmen seldom traveled more than a dozen miles from his land. There was no broad-based Irish nationalist spirit before O'Connell urged all Irishmen to think larger thoughts as a prelude to the fight for independence. Hence, an Irishman's view of the world was colored only by what he saw around him. Loyalty was to family, or more generally, to faction. Variations in speech, tradition, and practice added to the distance which separated one Irishman from another. In a fundamental way, an Irishman had little in common with anyone beyond those who shared his narrow tribal, parochial outlook. Even in Lowell, a Corkonian considered an emigrant from Tyrone as foreign as the Yankees who lived around both of them.<sup>46</sup>

The realities of immigration expanded this narrow tribalism to a limited degree. Whole communities did not come en masse to the United States intact. The tribal and community associations extended to include others from villages within County Cork, and presumably, from others in Cork's neighboring counties within the Province of Munster. Similarly, those considered members of the Fardowns did not all come from the exact same village or county, but newspaper references to Fardowns show a distinct geographic pattern of their origins confined to counties in Connacht or Leinster on the edge of Ulster. Where factions or secret societies from one county within Munster might have fought the residents of another Munster county in Ireland, in Lowell and elsewhere in the United States, Irish immigrants found they had more in common with those from their larger regional area than they did those from other corners of home. In the Paddy camps of Lowell and the work sites of canals and railroads, this broader, more regionalized social organization manifested itself in distinct presences at work and at home. Regional associations from Ireland defined the organization of camps and

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821-61* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 23.

villages. Mitchell states that county and village ties gave way to broader forms of identification, and “In their place were regional groupings of Corkonians and Connaughtmen.”<sup>47</sup>

Other factors contributed to immigrant laborers maintaining or reinforcing close ties to those from their home areas of Ireland. Emigrants leaving Ireland rarely appeared at ports without a plan for their journey and without encouragement from abroad. Vincent Powers’ study shows that kinship networks on the Blackstone Canal in the 1820s consistently drew members of the same family to work on the project.<sup>48</sup> By 1838, half of the passengers leaving Ireland paid their fares with money received from American friends and family, suggesting that family networks figured prominently in decisions to emigrate and for plans upon arrival.<sup>49</sup> Some contractors that hired the laborers on canals and railroads moved from state to state, taking their workers (and their respective secret society) with them.<sup>50</sup> It is also likely that secret societies worked together with intermediaries such as agents of shipping companies that recruited men to join their kin on public improvements. These networks would have been informal, thus no records exist to confirm this interaction.

With Irish immigrants grouped along such lines, the secret societies that formed seized upon the social structure of Irish immigrants and offered new, Americanized versions that were descendants of the Whiteboy and Ribbon traditions of Ireland. Secret society clashes on North American internal improvement sites first appeared as early as

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent Powers, “‘Invisible Immigrants’; the Pre-Famine Irish Community in Worcester, Massachusetts from 1826-1860,” (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1976), 118-119.

<sup>49</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 200.

<sup>50</sup> Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 165-166.

1827 on the Delaware and Hudson Canal and spread quickly elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> For some immigrants, opportunity for membership in a secret society became available as soon as their feet touched North American shores. Rumors circulating through canal agents investigating the presence of secret societies suggested that both the Corkonian and Fardown organizations had headquarters in New York City saloons. National leaders organized local branches on each internal improvement site and imparted the tasks of changing secret passwords and grips as needed.<sup>52</sup> Irish-American secret societies, descendants of the Whiteboy and Ribbon Men movements, amounted to a “rare, transatlantic strand of a pattern of violence characteristic of different parts of the Irish countryside at different times between 1760 and 1850.”<sup>53</sup>

An 1839 news story running in the *Daily Cleveland Herald* confirmed that the groups used the traditional methods of Irish peasant secret societies in communicating through coded messages. When a group of Fardowners attacked German immigrants working on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, militia troops stopped the Fardown attacks and routed the Irishmen. The militia ransacked Fardown shanties and shops, capturing twenty-six of their leaders in addition to a trove of documents circulated through the Fardown membership. These documents indicated recently implemented changes in passwords and signs. The cryptic exchanges found within the documents take the form of questions and responses designed to signal membership. The *Daily Cleveland Herald* reported:

The following are the pass-words and countersigns of the Connaughtmen, to which we have referred:

Q. The winter is favorable.

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<sup>51</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 327; Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 172.

<sup>52</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 327-328.

<sup>53</sup> Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

A. So is friendship increasing.  
Q. True Connaughtmen is valiant.  
A. Yes, and never will be defeated.

*Quarreling Words*

Q. That Connaughtmen may be steady.  
A. And they will be respected.

*Pass Words*

Q. That all Connaughtmen may be nice.  
A. Yes, without they may meet their enemies.<sup>54</sup>

Organizations nominally acting as benevolent or fraternal associations helped shield the functions of Corkonians and Fardowns on work sites from public scrutiny. The connection between these parent fraternal associations and brawling secret societies on canals and railroads became evident in 1840s. A riot between Cork and Connacht workers on the Welland Canal in Canada in 1843 resulted in the intervention of a priest, Father McDonagh. McDonagh attributed feuding on the Welland to secret societies among the Irish workers “binding them by oaths to be faithful to each other. One is called the Hibernian and another the Shamerick [sic] Society.”<sup>55</sup>

Immigrant fraternal organizations using variations of the names Hibernian and Shamrock existed in New York City and elsewhere by the early 1830s, ostensibly to provide charitable assistance and other services to new immigrants. Circumstantial but intriguing evidence suggests that these supposedly benevolent societies were the public arm of the Corkonians and Fardowns. The most famous organization connected to the name “Hibernians” originally operated in New York as St. Patrick’s Fraternal Society. This group reputedly had connections to the Ribbon Men in Ireland.<sup>56</sup> The St. Patrick’s Fraternal Society charter called upon its members to “never provoke, challenge, or fight

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<sup>54</sup> “The Canal War,” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, 12 September 1839, NCUSNP.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 196.

<sup>56</sup> The Ribbon Men formally changed their name to the St. Patrick’s Fraternal Society before ultimately becoming the Ancient Order of Hibernians. See Hugh B.C. Pollard, *The Secret Societies of Ireland: Their Rise and Progress* (London: P. Allan, 1922), 47-48.

any of the Brethren” and in matters of business that “preference shall be given to those attached to the interests of the Society,” tenants that would serve the organization well if they maintained connections to laboring organizations on canals and railroads.<sup>57</sup> St. Patrick’s Fraternal Society merged with another organization in Ireland in 1836 to form a new group under the banner of Hibernians. This organization ultimately grew into the modern day Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH).<sup>58</sup> Today the AOH is the largest Catholic Irish-American organization in the United States.

The American Hibernians received a charter from a parent organization closely aligned with the network of Ribbon Men of Ireland. The names signed to the original charter from the Irish version of the organization include the county affiliations of the signers—Fermanagh, Monaghan, Meath, Antrim, Tyrone, Cavan, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, and Longford—all nestled in the region of Ireland deemed “far down” to those from Munster.<sup>59</sup> Additional evidence seems to point to a connection between Irish Ribbon Men societies and transplants in America. A Ribbon password uncovered in Ireland in 1833 includes the following cryptic suggestion:

Q: How long is your stick?

A: Long enough to reach my enemies.

Q: To what trunk does the wood belong?

A: To a French trunk that blooms in America and whose leaves shall shelter the sons of Erin.<sup>60</sup>

Although it is speculation, it seems likely that the organization that grew into the modern AOH, a fraternal Irish-American organization that staunchly supports Irish nationalist policies and “peace and Unity for all of Ireland,” once had connections to the

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<sup>57</sup> Hugh B.C. Pollard, *The Secret Societies of Ireland*, 111-112.

<sup>58</sup> John O’Dea, *History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Ladies Auxiliary* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Philadelphia: Blackstone, 1923; reprint Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 768.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 886-887.

<sup>60</sup> Hugh B.C. Pollard, *The Secret Societies of Ireland*, 38.

Fardowns and their inter-Irish squabbles.<sup>61</sup> The AOH grew out of Ribbon associations in Ireland, the leadership of its Irish branch centered in counties far north of Munster, it originally operated as a benevolent society with easy access to new immigrants, and its name recalls those admonished by Father McDonagh. The AOH also has a confirmed history of connection with laborer secret societies. The AOH's association with the Molly Maguires garnered national headlines in the 1860s and 1870s. The Molly Maguires worked in the anthracite mines of Pennsylvania before battling mine management over work conditions, resorting to intimidation tactics and murder. Historians have debated whether the Molly Maguires as an organization were indeed responsible for the totality of actions that lead to the hanging of twenty of their number. However, Molly Maguire scholar Kevin Kenny notes the evidence does support at least one truth: "Certain immigrant workers, particularly those from north-central and north-western Ireland, used their lodges of the Ancient Order of Hibernians for classic 'Ribbonite' purposes, adapting to local conditions in Pennsylvania a strategy of violent protest that had its origins in the Irish countryside."<sup>62</sup>

A tidy explanation of the "Shamrocks" as the parent organization of the Corkonians and the "Hibernians" to the Fardowns is impossible given that fraternal organizations using "Shamrock" in their name also had affiliations with the group growing into the AOH.<sup>63</sup> Yet the connection between Corkonians and Fardowns to parent fraternal organizations, whatever their names, is clear. The writing and actions of Archbishop John Hughes in the early 1840s speaks to the fraternal organization

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<sup>61</sup> Ancient Order of Hibernians Website, [online], available from: [http://www.aoh.com/pages/national\\_programs/political\\_education\\_committee/political\\_education\\_committee.html](http://www.aoh.com/pages/national_programs/political_education_committee/political_education_committee.html). 12 July 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 285.

<sup>63</sup> Wayne G. Broehl, Jr. *The Molly Maguires* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 33-39.

association with the secret societies. Hughes, the archbishop of the New York diocese, recognized the threat to Catholicism posed by the duplicitous actions of the so-called “benevolent” and “fraternal” societies that claimed to serve an Irish immigrant constituency in charitable terms while clandestinely orchestrating warfare on internal improvement projects.

In 1841, Hughes sought out the leaders of the fraternal societies that he deemed to have objectionable missions preventing members from complying with religious duties. Father Hughes believed that “many of the scandals and quarrels among Irishmen and Catholics on public works and elsewhere throughout the country had their origin in the objectionable parts of such associations.”<sup>64</sup> The fraternal organizations, possibly fearing backlash within the Irish immigrant community for overtly disobeying the Catholic Church, agreed to submit their constitutions and by-laws to Hughes and to amend offensive passages. As a sign of appreciation to the fraternal organizations, Hughes agreed to allow them to assist in the religious services observing St. Patrick’s Day.<sup>65</sup> Three societies assisted Archbishop Hughes at St. Patrick’s Day services in 1841, the Hibernian E.B. Society, the Hibernian Universal Benevolent Society, and the Shamrock Benevolent Society.<sup>66</sup> The names of Hughes’ St. Patrick’s Day assistants are compelling in their strikingly similarity to the groups identified by Father McDonagh as involved in the Corkonian and Fardown feuds on the Welland Canal, the Hibernian Society and the Shamrock Society.

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<sup>64</sup> Fergus MacDonald, *The Catholic Church and the Secret Societies in the United States* (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1946), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



In 1842, Hughes issued a pastoral letter condemning membership in secret societies that required actions or oaths contrary to Catholic teachings. The pastoral letter failed to name specific societies and many in the Church, public, and media misinterpreted Hughes' words as directed at organizations such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows.<sup>67</sup> Hughes clarified his stance by directly assailing those organizations associated with the Corkonians and Fardowns:

If there had been but one society, although still unlawful, yet the consequences to the community and to its own dupes could not have been so fatal; but there were at least two,—and I have had much reason to believe that the contagions of these two led to many of those riots and disturbances on public works which are spoken of in the newspapers as between “Corkonians and Connaught men—far-ups and far-downs.”<sup>68</sup>

Despite his best efforts, Hughes failed in completely curbing participation in the Corkonians and Fardowns. Irish immigrants far away from the Archbishop's watchful eye continued to battle. Outside of New York, new immigrants received membership in fraternal societies and their associated secret societies under the auspices that such participation had Bishop Hughes' blessing. Hughes noted that secret societies duped new initiates into thinking that their actions had the approval of the Catholic Church.<sup>69</sup>

As Irish immigrants flocked to North American internal improvement projects in the 1830s, the tradition of viewing themselves as exiles in a new land led to retained Irish cultural traits. Immigrants lived, worked, and socialized with other immigrants from their own regions of Ireland, often family and friends dating to the old country, further insulating themselves from assimilation and entrenching long held prejudices held against those from other Irish locales. Some imported cultural institutions, such as St. Patrick's

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 14-17.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

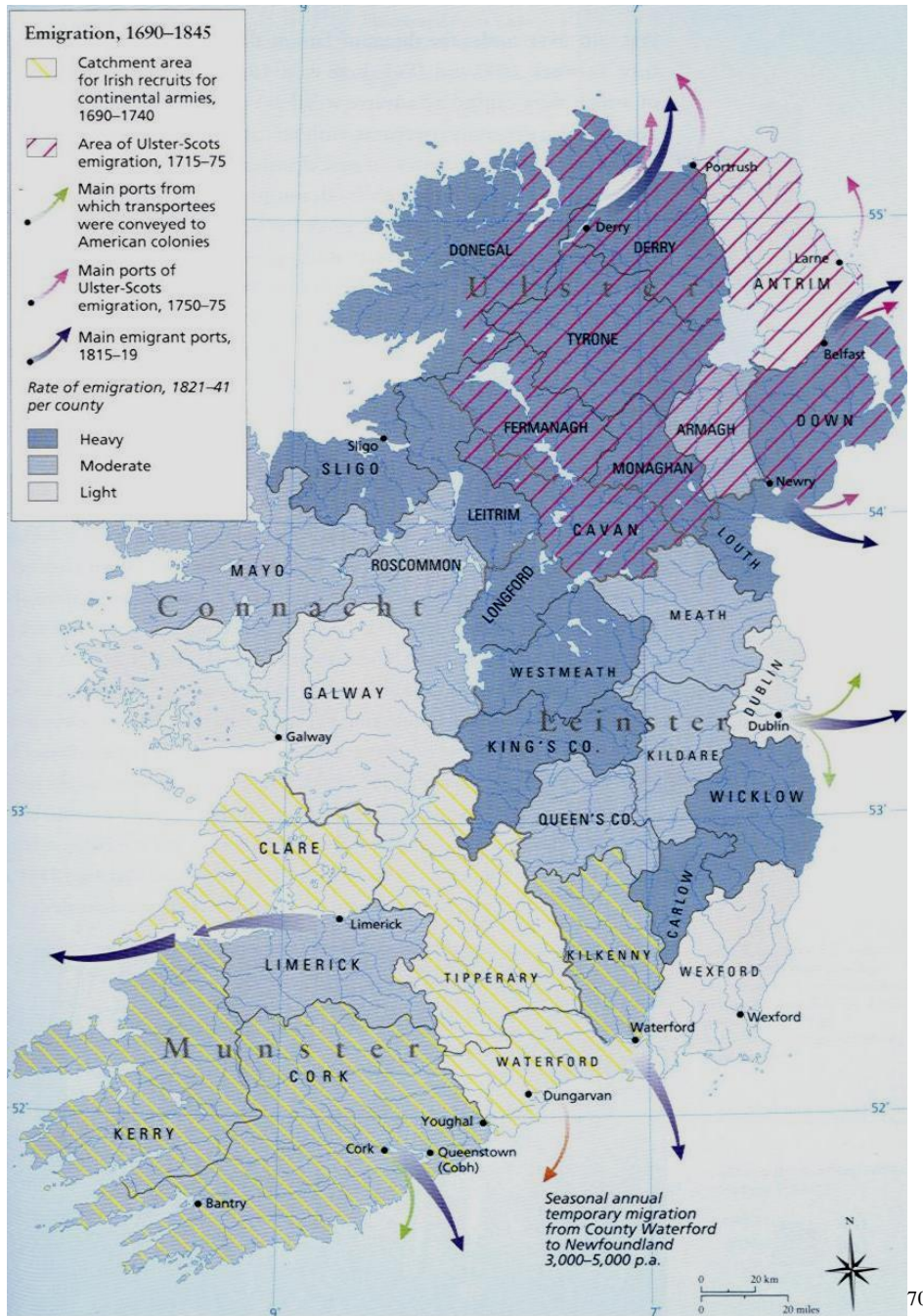
<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Day observance, proved to be benign gifts absorbed by American culture. Yet a significant minority of these immigrants also imported the traditions of the Whiteboy and Ribbon societies, the mutations of which turned into a twenty-year running feud in the United States and Canada between Corkonians and Fardowns. Secret societies and their companion fraternal organizations recruited Irish laborers on their arrival in Eastern ports, on their arrival to public improvement work sites, and perhaps before they left Ireland. The workers on the Wabash and Erie Canal, the Central Canal, and the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad in Indiana were socially isolated, predominantly male, and came from a culture where addressing economic grievances through violence was common. Although the Corkonian and Fardown feud was in its relative infancy in North America when these two groups opened their hostility in Indiana, the rivalry and the systems that created it were firmly in place.

Figure 2: Map of Ireland's Counties and Provinces



**Figure 3: Map of Irish Emigration 1690-1845.** Note the areas of Ulster-Scots (Protestant) emigration are not in the Connacht and Leinster provinces associated with the Fardowns secret society.



<sup>70</sup> Sean Duffy, Gabriel Doherty, Raymond Gillespie, James Kelly, Colm Lennon, Brendan Smith, eds., *The MacMillan Atlas of Irish History* (New York: MacMillan, 1997), 91.

### CHAPTER III

#### A “MAD CAREER”: IRISH SECRET SOCIETIES IN INDIANA, 1835-1837

The feud between laborers from the southern Irish province of Munster and the northern provinces of Connacht and Leinster originated in the economic woes of Ireland. Connacht laborers, unable to find work in their home province, frequently sought work in the areas of Munster, which posed a threat to the livelihoods of the laborers already entrenched in that area. Those that left Ireland for North America traveled with pent up regional animosity as they crossed the Atlantic. The competition for jobs on canals and railroads between immigrants from Ireland mimicked the competition for land between those from the north and the south enacted in their homeland. Matthew E. Mason concludes in his study of Irish trackmen working on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that itinerant workers from Connacht created hostility among those living in other regions of Ireland, and this animosity transferred easily as Irish immigrants competed again in their new country.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Connacht laborers insulated themselves from this regional animosity by assuming “a provincial, as opposed to a county-level, identity.”<sup>2</sup> Provincial and county level identities, historic feuds rooted in economic competition, and cultural attachments to violent secret societies as a method to redress economic grievances proved a powerful collection of factors as Irish immigrants went to work on internal improvement projects.

A mixture of outrageous brawls, large-scale riots, and clandestine warfare raged across North America on the site of nearly every canal and railroad under construction

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew E. Mason, ““The Hands Here are Disposed to be Turbulent,”” 264.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

during the middle of the 1800s. Peter Way identifies over twenty faction fights between opposing groups of Irish laborers working on canals between 1834 and 1844 in the U.S. and Canada. This number is higher if railroad workers or Irish secret societies battling non-Irish workers are considered.<sup>3</sup> Fights between Corkonians and Fardowns generally centered on enforcing a closed shop mentality. By driving the other society away, the winning faction could preserve the available work for themselves through artificially created labor shortages. Corkonians and Fardowns also fought contractors, other ethnic groups, and nativists—essentially fighting anyone who potentially served as an obstacle to employment and wages. Some uprisings were small; others were large-scale battles involving multiple casualties that required militia involvement to restore order.<sup>4</sup>

The first widely reported example of the Corkonian and Fardown feuds occurred near Williamsport, Maryland, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal a year before the Wabash and Erie riot. Corkonians assaulted a group of Fardowns and killed one of their members. After the dust settled from the initial skirmish both sides prepared for war. The Fardowns, by now 600 in number, attacked 300 Corkonians in an attempt to drive them from the field and the canal line. Both sides had armed themselves with firearms, exchanging volleys before engaging in fierce hand-to-hand combat. The Fardowns' numerical superiority allowed them to rout their Corkonian rivals, leaving several dead in their wake. The ferocity of the conflict shocked the citizens in the vicinity who promptly

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 288-295.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* During the ten years between 1834 and 1844, Way notes a total of sixty-one organized disturbances involving canal workers, including but not limited to disturbances labeled as “riot,” “general disorder,” “attack on contractors,” and “attack on German laborers.” Way also notes twenty occasions of canal disturbances that involved militia, police, or troops to restore order. The overwhelming majority of these disturbances are attributable to secret societies such as the Corkonians and the Fardowns.

alerted the militia.<sup>5</sup> Federal troops joined with the militia in responding to the scene. According to historian Richard B. Morris, this amounted to the first time in U.S. history that federal troops stepped in to help settle a labor dispute.<sup>6</sup>

The reasons behind the conflict on the Chesapeake and Ohio eluded contemporary observers. Many attributed the brawl to an Irish stereotype towards public brawling or dismissed it as a historical grudge without pretext. One contemporary, Thomas Purcell, an engineer on the canal works, provided partial insight by writing that the battle was “the result of a regular organization for that purpose, the ultimate object being to expel from the canal all except those that belong to the strongest party and thus secure for the remainder higher wages.”<sup>7</sup> If one of the two organizations drove the other from the work site, the winning side could thus dictate better working conditions, in addition to preserving access to the limited number of jobs available for their membership.<sup>8</sup>

Other feuds followed the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal outbreak throughout North America. In the United States, Irish secret societies fought in New Orleans in 1834, in New York on the Chenango Canal in 1835, and on the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1838. In Canada, Corkonians and Fardowns battled on the Long Sault Canal in 1835, on the Welland Canal throughout 1842 and 1843, and on the Williamsburg Canal in 1844.<sup>9</sup> For much of the 1830s and 1840s, wherever railroad or canal construction occurred, the Irish followed, bringing with them the Corkonian and Fardown feud. Even when large, public riots failed to materialize, the hostility between the laborers did not lay dormant.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard B. Morris, “Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker,” *American Historical Review* 55 (October 1949), 57-62; Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 200-201.

<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Morris, “Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker,” 54.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-57.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 289-293.

Small disturbances, often unreported by the press, were regular occurrences. One account that bears witness to the animosity between the two factions comes from a contemporary of the Corkonians and Fardowns, Irish immigrant Andrew Leary O'Brien. O'Brien recorded his thoughts on the feud as it occurred near Muddy Creek, Pennsylvania in 1838. At Muddy Creek, contractors hired only members of one party or the other, keeping the Corkonians and Fardowns separated during their daily work. Despite this attempt to keep the factions from each other, "so deadly was the character of their enmity towards each other, that one of a different party even passing by the other party would be run down like a rabbit by a pack of bloodhounds, & murdered on the spot he was overtaken on."<sup>10</sup> O'Brien lodged near a camp of Corkonians where he personally witnessed, "A number of these men leave their work & run down a man from the next job who was the different party, & beat him with pick and grub hoe handles, till he was so dead that he was not worth another blow."<sup>11</sup>

The terror of Corkonian and Fardown feuding was not confined to actual violence; the mere perception of violence was often enough to send panic throughout the workers' camps. O'Brien recalled several incidents where the rumor of approaching Fardowns sent the Corkonian camp scurrying in the dark of night to "get dressed, & get out before we were burnt up or shot down."<sup>12</sup> In another incident, O'Brien recalled a rumor of a Fardown attack sending Corkonians working on the opposite side of the creek plunging into the water to meet their supposed attackers on the other shore. One man drowned in doing so despite the attack never materializing.<sup>13</sup> The hostilities left their

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Leary O'Brien, *The Journal of Andrew Leary O'Brien*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



mark on O'Brien who retired from the stonemason business after just five months, vowing to "never more live where I would be obliged to deal so largely with the lower classes of the Irish in this country on public works."<sup>14</sup>

While the Corkonians and Fardowns shared a grudge dating back to Ireland, their fights on public improvements transcended mere historical prejudice and spoke to genuine work place grievances. Regional animosities formed the base of the rivalry, but specific agitating work issues precipitated Corkonian and Fardown battles. Peter Way argues that the fight on the Chesapeake and Ohio, as well as conflicts on other canals, resulted from the exploitative nature of the relationship between labor and management. Riots among the Corkonians and Fardowns usually stemmed from a specific factor that threatened to limit work opportunities, such as an economic downturn or an employer's inability to pay for work rendered. Way argues that in the 1834 Chesapeake and Ohio battles, militia and federal troops did not stop the rioters. Instead, the riots stopped when the "additional subscription of company stock in March, 1834 financially revitalized the C&O, temporarily obviating the need for workers to fight over employment."<sup>15</sup> When jobs on internal improvements were plentiful, Corkonians and Fardowns existed peacefully; when employment was scarce, violence erupted.

The mammoth scope of the Indiana internal improvement system meant that the state had capital problems from the inception.<sup>16</sup> A large accumulation of debt financed construction and even under the best-case scenario, it would take years before tolls and tickets might recoup the investment. As early as 1834, the canal commissioners wrote

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 202.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 209.

that there was “much distress on the line for cash, and it was so much needed to lay in provisions and pay hands.”<sup>17</sup> Even as construction crept slowly forward, Indiana’s system “was also moving steadily toward a financial crisis.”<sup>18</sup> Financial insolvency may have contributed to slowdowns in work or a reduction in the payment of wages that contributed to unrest among the laborers. Even the completion of a section of the canal, which left laborers out of work and required them to seek employment on other sections, might serve to increase the friction between the factions. Three months before the Wabash and Erie riot, U.S. Senator John Tipton wrote to the *Logansport (IN) Telegraph* to complain that engineers sent by the legislature on surveying missions for proposed canal routes in other parts of the state hindered the progress of Wabash and Erie construction by diverting funds.<sup>19</sup> The combination of reductions in resources and the potential for reduced or non-existent wage payments decreased the available employment opportunities for Irish workers. As witnessed on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, a reduction in work opportunities, both real and perceived by the canal hands, precipitated Corkonian and Fardown clashes in Indiana.

The influx of workers who arrived in 1834 to work on the Wabash and Erie were veterans of the Corkonian and Fardown battles on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.<sup>20</sup> It did not take much to stoke the feud’s flames in a new location. The largest disturbance between Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana occurred in July of 1835, but the first sign of trouble happened several months earlier. In

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> David Burr’s letter to Governor Noah Noble states that the Corkonians and Fardowns arrived in September of 1834 after having been involved in “affrays at Williamsport in Maryland and at the ‘high rocks on the Potomac.’” See David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835,” in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers Relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 419-420; “100 Dollars Reward,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 11 September 1835, NCUSNP.

late 1834, a group of laborers near Huntington, agitated by alcohol, poor work conditions, faction animosity, or any other of numerous possibilities, gathered near the home of a local resident identified in newspaper accounts only as Mr. Turner. The laborers reportedly formed a mob “acting in a very riotous manner.”<sup>21</sup> An irritated Turner left his home in what the paper called an “endeavor to quell the riot,” but the Irish “kicked and beat him with clubs so unmercifully that this life was endangered.”<sup>22</sup> Turner’s brother attempted to rescue his fallen sibling, only to be attacked himself by the rioters who admonished him to return to the safety of the house. Undaunted, Turner’s brother returned armed with a gun pointed at the Irish mob. The laborers reportedly challenged him to “fire and be d\_\_\_\_d.”<sup>23</sup> At this prompt, Turner’s brother fired and killed one of the assailants. The Irish collected the body of their fallen comrade and quickly dispersed. “Mr. Turner immediately surrendered himself to the civil authorities, who, after an investigation of the case, discharged him.”<sup>24</sup>

It is almost certain that the rioters at Mr. Turner’s home were members of a secret society given the closed-shop practices of such organizations. They likely were Corkonians given that members of that particular association populated the sections of the canal near Huntington. What is important in recounting this story, however, is not which secret society was involved; the important point is that Irish immigrant canal laborers on the Wabash and Erie did not suddenly resort to violence the following July after living a previously peaceable existence on the canal line. The incident at Turner’s

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<sup>21</sup> “Melancholy Affair,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 5 December 1834, NCUSNP.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

house illustrates that the culture bred in the camps of Irish laborers was turbulent, that a pattern of disturbing and violent behavior was already developing.

When participants from the Chesapeake and Ohio riots came to the Wabash and Erie beginning in September of 1834, the Corkonians initially had the numerical advantage on the canal. An influx of Fardowns rapidly increased tensions through early 1835.<sup>25</sup> The increase in the number of laborers competing for jobs previously dominated by Corkonians is likely the impetus for the actions that followed. Tensions between the two groups grew into a steady wave of violent attacks. A Corkonian or Fardown traveling the canal alone threw caution to the wind and risked his personal safety. In the weeks and months leading up to the July 12 riot, Canal Commissioner David Burr noted that the Corkonians and Fardowns “manifested their ill will to each other by merciless beatings on such of each party as chanced to fall in the power of the other.”<sup>26</sup>

Which side started the hostilities is unclear, although it is likely that the Corkonians, fearing the loss of their numerical superiority and still smarting from their losses at Williamsport, Maryland, instigated the trouble. Both sides feared cabin burnings or random attacks from their adversaries. Such worries were justified: precedent from previous examples of Corkonian and Fardown feuds paint a gruesome picture. In 1834 on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, tension between members of the two secret societies led to burned shanties, “broken heads, black eyes and bloody noses without count,” and eventually left four persons dead.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 419.

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

<sup>27</sup> Matthew E. Mason, “The Hands Here are Disposed to be Turbulent,” 257.

The Wabash and Erie's contractors separated the Corkonians and Fardowns so that they worked on different sections of the canal line, but such precautions did not end threats between the two camps. In the weeks leading to July 12, both factions took to abandoning their camps and shanties at night, opting for the limited protection offered by sleeping in the woods without light and fires in hopes of avoiding discovery by their enemies. David Burr wrote that the problems became "so exasperated, that about the first of July, a determination became general that one or the other should leave the line."<sup>28</sup>

From July 4 through July 10 rumors of mass attacks forced laborers to abandon their work posts to prepare for battle or to seek refuge on safer ground, disrupting the construction of the canal. With the exception of the incident at Mr. Turner's home, the secret societies directed the majority of their violence to this point towards their rivals, with the citizenry largely avoiding direct exposure to hostilities. Yet as the intensity of the dispute grew, settlers and townspeople came under threat as well. Irish laborers held up a wagon on the highway, absconding with three kegs of gunpowder. Corkonians and Fardowns ransacked homes, and forcibly removed guns and ammunition, in some cases under threat of murder to the inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> During one exchange, a Corkonian "wretch" named Jeremiah Sullivan fired at a canal contractor identified in newspaper accounts only as "Mr. Brady."<sup>30</sup>

Exasperation with the constant threat of attack set in on both sides of the conflict. Neither side wished to continue to live and work under a constant state of siege; a date

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<sup>28</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 420.

<sup>29</sup> "Disturbance on the Canal Line," (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* The article refers to the shooter as "a wretch named Sullivan." Subsequent articles identify this man as Jeremiah Sullivan, although his official prison records with the State of Indiana identify him as Jerome Sullivan. This Jeremiah Sullivan should not be confused with a prominent contemporary of the same name appointed to the Indiana Supreme Court in 1836.

for a showdown was set. On July 10, Corkonians and Fardowns ceased work altogether, and separated by a fifty-mile stretch of canal line, began the long, slow march towards each other to settle their differences. The Corkonians marched west from the vicinity of Huntington with 300 men. The Fardowns, equal in number, forged ahead east from the area of Peru.<sup>31</sup> The burgeoning canal hamlet of Lagro, the proposed site of the battle, rested halfway between the two groups. When rumors of a proposed battle reached David Burr, the canal commissioner initially discounted the chatter as unsubstantiated hearsay. Soon, however, Burr received intelligence that confirmed the rumors from a canal engineer. The Fardowns “were armed and marching to the reputed battlefield.”<sup>32</sup>

Burr, the only one of the three canal commissioners present at the time, took it upon himself to head off the coming calamity. He did not have to look far to find the Fardowns, who by this time had completed their march and were gathered a half-mile from Burr’s Lagro home. Burr later recorded that he found the men in a “very orderly array” and “well armed.”<sup>33</sup> Burr approached the Fardowns seeking a list of grievances and a way to pacify them long enough to avoid the impending battle. The Fardowns reported to Burr that:

They were forced, as they considered, to fight to protect themselves to prevent their being slain and their property burned at night, that the civil authority did not or could not protect them; that their families could not stay in their shantees, had to sleep in the woods, and they had no resource left but a battle; that the weaker party might leave the line; that they wished to work and remain peaceable, could not, but would rather fight fairly in open day than be subject to these depredations at night.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 420-421.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Burr temporarily appeased the Fardowns with a promise to negotiate an end to the hostilities with the Corkonians. Seeking the Corkonians, Burr gathered a small group of men to assist him with the peace negotiations, including Catholic priest Simon Lalumiere.<sup>35</sup> Burr's posse found the Corkonians already in position at the proposed battleground in Lagro. The Corkonians, however, were less interested in a peaceful resolution to the situation than their Fardown opponents were. Burr found them "fully prepared, well disposed in a strong military position, [and] exceedingly exasperated."<sup>36</sup> The possession of a cannon stolen from the town of Huntington undoubtedly enhanced the Corkonians' "strong military position." Without proper ammunition, the Corkonians had loaded the cannon with gravel, less damaging than a cannonball, but certainly enough to do serious damage when the Fardowns arrived.<sup>37</sup> The negotiation process tested Burr's ability as a diplomat; the Corkonians grew unruly and Burr recorded that he "had some difficulty in saving those who went with me from being killed."<sup>38</sup> With the help of the influential Lalumiere, Burr calmed the Corkonians long enough to learn that their grievances were identical to those expressed by the Fardowns. Burr persuaded the Corkonians to agree to a two-day cessation of hostilities, averting the immediate threat of open hostilities and disorder within Lagro. The Corkonians also agreed to appoint delegates to a peace conference with the Fardowns.<sup>39</sup>

The peace treaty idea was not a novel concept with Corkonian and Fardown insurgents. Members engaged in fighting during the construction of the Baltimore and

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<sup>35</sup> Charles R. Poinsett, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 421.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Castaldi, *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook III*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 421.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Ohio Railroad in 1834 conferred in a peace conference at the direction of a local priest, Father John McElroy. The factions signed an accord in which they “mutually agreed to bury forever . . . all remembrance of feuds and animosities, as well as injuries sustained.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Corkonians and Fardowns ended a tumultuous January of 1834 by signing a peace treaty orchestrated by the county sheriff. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal treaty, mockingly referred to as a “novelty in Diplomatic History” by a Washington, D.C. newspaper, purported to end all future warfare between the secret societies on that particular internal improvement site.<sup>41</sup> That treaty, signed by twenty-eight members of warring Irish immigrant secret societies, stated that the parties agreed to inform on and bring to justice any person who broke the pledge.<sup>42</sup>

The Chesapeake and Ohio treaty did not have the lasting effect that officials had hoped. Repeated unrest involving secret societies plagued the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio at least through 1839.<sup>43</sup> Indiana newspapers covering the Wabash and Erie riot connected the outbreak of violence to the Chesapeake and Ohio riots, claiming that Jeremiah Sullivan, the man who fired a gun at a canal contractor, “took a prominent part in the disturbances in Maryland last year, and is also deeply implicated in the murders committed at Williamsburg, Pa. four years ago.”<sup>44</sup>

David Burr, perhaps wise to the fact that a peace treaty, if signed, would only be a temporary fix for the faction fighting, sought a more permanent method of settling the dispute. His treaty idea served to buy time until he could he take more authoritative

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew E. Mason, “The Hands Here are Disposed to be Turbulent,” 261.

<sup>41</sup> “Riots upon the Canal,” (*Washington, D.C.*) *Daily Intelligencer*, 3 February 1834, NCUSNP.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 89-91.

<sup>44</sup> “Disturbance on the Canal Line,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP.



action. Burr and the citizens near the gathered Corkonians and Fardowns turned to the Indiana militia to establish order. A dispatch requesting militia assistance arrived at Fort Wayne on July 11.<sup>45</sup> Two hours after the dispatch arrived, sixty-three men, “well armed, and furnished with provisions, were on their march to the scene of the action.”<sup>46</sup> Fearing the number of respondents to be too small to subdue the roughly 600 Irishmen, Burr requested the services of additional militia units from Lagro, Huntington, and Logansport. Even Chief Godfroy of the Miami Tribe, appalled at the behavior of the laborers, reputedly offered to “crush” the Irish with his warriors.<sup>47</sup>

With the arrival of the militia on July 12, many of the Irish laborers fled into the woods. Others attempted to sneak back to their worksites and camps undetected. Not content with merely breaking up the rioters, the militia searched the woods and raided shanties, arresting as many laborers as they could find and relieving them of their weapons. Additional assistance came in the form of the sheriffs of Huntington and Wabash counties, two magistrates, and an associate judge to make mass arrests.<sup>48</sup> Varying accounts place the number of rioters arrested between 100 and 200.<sup>49</sup>

The prompt response of the militia is attributable in part to the severity of the situation and the urgency with which Burr and other citizens made their pleas. That the militia members were likely glad to have something to do also partially explains the quick response. Indiana militia units were active participants in the War of 1812 but experienced only sporadic calls to service in the following two decades, usually to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Clarkson Weesner, *History of Wabash County Indiana* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1914), 236.

<sup>48</sup> “Disturbance on the Canal Line,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>49</sup> The (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP, claims 100 rioters detained. The reminiscence of Lagro attorney and future judge William H. Coombs, as recalled in Clarkson Weesner’s *History of Wabash County Indiana*, claims closer to 200 men arrested.

witness Indian treaties or respond to rumors of Indian attacks that never materialized. By 1835, militia service and participation had largely ceased to be an essential form of frontier protection, evolving into what amounted to a social outlet for frontier Hoosiers. Muster days, usually held in May and October, provided opportunities for drill and instruction in addition to general carousing. The carousing became such a problem that Indiana banned the sale of whiskey from within two miles of a militia gathering.<sup>50</sup> Fines of fifty cents were routinely issued to citizens who failed to show up for militia muster and records suggest that collecting the fines proved just as difficult as compelling people to attend.<sup>51</sup>

The leadership of the militia units that responded amounted to a veritable “who’s who” of frontier northern Indiana. Colonel John Spencer headed the Fort Wayne detachment. Spencer had been a county sheriff, a Deputy U.S. Marshall, and received a federal appointment as the Receiver of the Land Office at Fort Wayne. Accompanying Spencer in the role of ensign was Henry Rudisill, the postmaster for Fort Wayne. Rudisill would also later offer character testimony for Spencer in legal proceedings involving alleged misappropriation of money from the Land Office.<sup>52</sup> Spear Tipton, son of Battle of Tippecanoe veteran and U.S. Senator John Tipton, led the Logansport contingent.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps trying to emulate his father’s military success, Spear Tipton later led a company of Cass County volunteers in the Mexican War, a conflict from which he

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<sup>50</sup> William J. Watt and James R.H. Spears, *Indiana’s Citizen Soldiers: The Militia and National Guard in Indiana History* (Indianapolis: Indiana State Armory Board, 1980), 16-28.

<sup>51</sup> Ledger of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Indiana Militia, 1822-1876, passim, IHSMC.

<sup>52</sup> John Spencer, *Letter of Col. John Spencer, Late Receiver of the Land Office at Fort Wayne, Indiana, together with Papers and Documents Connected with the Settlement of his Accounts with the Government of the United States* (New York: Baker, Godwin & Co., 1852), 39.

<sup>53</sup> For a list of the 25 members of the Logansport company, see Jehu Z. Powell, *History of Cass County Indiana, Vol. I* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 128.

did not return.<sup>54</sup> Elias Murray, captain of the Huntington volunteers, was a member of the Indiana legislature and a confidant of John Tipton, often functioning as the Senator's business agent while Tipton tended to his Senate business.

The mass arrests of Irish laborers exposed a fundamental problem in establishing law and order in the sparsely settled portions of the state. Wabash County, having only recently received recognition as an official county, did not have the resources or facilities to handle the influx of prisoners. On July 8, the Wabash Board of County Commissioners (who had only staged their inaugural meeting the preceding month) authorized construction of a log and stone county jail, likely a result of the increase in feuding between Corkonians and Fardowns.<sup>55</sup> With the jail unfinished and without facilities to secure the large numbers arrested, Wabash County enacted an impromptu prosecution. William H. Coombs, a young attorney at the time of the trial, recalled:

I found about two hundred locked up. I had been undecided whether to locate in Fort Wayne or Logansport, but finding so much criminal business here decided to remain. An amusing incident occurred when those two hundred prisoners were tried. Associate Judge Ballinger was missing when the case came up, and so Judge Jackson ordered the clerk to issue an attachment for his body and bring him into court. This was carried out to the letter. The two hundred prisoners were found guilty.<sup>56</sup>

The sentence issued to the rioters is unknown, but the practical considerations of building a canal clearly superseded themes of crime and punishment. Canal construction had to continue and the Irish, including those in secret societies, represented the labor pool by which Indiana's commitment to internal improvements would advance. The majority of the workers received clearance to return to their construction sites. Convinced that law and order had been restored, the (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*

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<sup>54</sup> Jehu Z. Powell, *History of Cass County Indiana, Vol. I*, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Clarkson Weesner, *History of Wabash County*, 157.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

claimed the Irish were “fully satisfied that they could not trample on the laws of the state with impunity,” and should they “proceed any further in their mad career, they would inevitably meet with punishment due to such lawless proceedings.”<sup>57</sup>

The majority of the militia members received their discharge and returned home, the Fort Wayne contingent having marched roughly 125 miles in six days. The press offered praise, back slaps, and congratulations to all involved in quelling the riot. The *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* exclaimed, “Great credit is due to the citizens of Fort Wayne, Huntington, Logansport, and the canal line generally, for the spirit manifested on this occasion.”<sup>58</sup> The *Logansport (IN) Canal Telegraph* boasted that the militia did their duty “in a manner that is highly creditable to themselves and their communities.”<sup>59</sup>

Not all of the militia members, however, were done with their assignment. The leaders of the Corkonians and the Fardowns, deemed too dangerous to return to the canal line, were marched to Indianapolis for safekeeping. Elias Murray, the captain of the Huntington militia company, William G. Johnson, the Wabash County sheriff, and sixteen soldiers accompanied the prisoners to the state capital, the site of the closest suitable jail. Murray and his men did not have the luxury of a direct route to the capital city. Instead the remaining militia detachment marched the men west through the woods toward Logansport before turning south toward their final destination. The unruly prisoners refused to comply with the militia’s direction and Murray’s command soon found itself in a precarious situation at a river crossing near Logansport. As recounted in Clarkson Weesner’s *History of Wabash County*:

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<sup>57</sup> “Disturbance on the Canal Line,” *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Logansport (IN) Canal Telegraph*, 18 July 1835, Indiana State Library Newspaper Collection (ISLNC).

At the mouth of the Eel River, the Wabash had to be waded, though rather deep. The prisoners refused to wade, declaring they would die first. The captain [Elias Murray] simply told the boys to be 'ready'; still prisoners refused, when the captain, giving an order to fix bayonets, directed the soldiers to charge. The charge was made and the prisoners, with a howl, sprang for the ford and waded through, with the bayonets at their backs. Once safely across the river, a rank was formed, and the 'boys' were required to walk in front; and thus the end of the journey was safely reached and the prisoners were placed in limbo at the state capital.<sup>60</sup>

The eight riot leaders and Murray's detachment arrived in Indianapolis on July 23.<sup>61</sup> If David Burr and others hoped for severe punishment for the instigators of the Lagro riot, he would soon be disappointed. The Corkonian and Fardown leaders received quick releases because of a technicality relating to a writ of habeas corpus. The ringleaders of the riot, however, did not receive the same welcome back to the canal line that Corkonian and Fardown masses enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the Lagro affair. Jeremiah Sullivan attempted to return to the Wabash and Erie only to be re-arrested, convicted, and sentenced to the penitentiary for shooting at a canal contractor.<sup>62</sup>

Sullivan proved a crafty prisoner, escaping from Sheriff Johnson's custody en route to the prison in Jeffersonville.<sup>63</sup> Johnson placed an advertisement in the (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal* with an offer of a \$100 reward for Sullivan's capture. The advertisement identified Sullivan as a Corkonian "30 to 35 years old, upwards of 6 feet high, of athletic form, dark complexion, black eyes, his hair black and on the back part of the head curly," who has "a large share of the brogue upon his tongue common to

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<sup>60</sup> Clarkson Weesner, *History of Wabash County*, 237.

<sup>61</sup> Noted Indianapolis attorney and chronicler Calvin Fletcher recorded the arrival of the prisoners, Murray, and Johnson in his diary. See Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, Vol. I: 1817-1838* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972), 267.

<sup>62</sup> "100 Dollars Reward," (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 11 September 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>63</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 423.

his countrymen.”<sup>64</sup> Sullivan’s flight to freedom did not last long. A week later, the *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* reported Sullivan recaptured and “safely lodged in the penitentiary.”<sup>65</sup>

The financial cost to restore order to the Wabash and Erie exceeded the coffers of a county in its infancy such as Wabash. Private citizens funded the militia, travel expenses of those leading the riot’s leaders to Indianapolis, and the reward money for Sullivan’s capture. Governor Noah Noble publicly took the stance that the Wabash and Erie riot was threatening “the progress of the work in which the state is engaged, [thus] it is believed the treasury of that county is not justly chargeable with the expense.”<sup>66</sup> Despite the governor’s intentions, the legislature proved slow to embrace the idea of reimbursement to those that quelled the riot, likely due to the increasing financial burden internal improvements placed on the state’s treasury. Elias Murray, having personally funded his militia company’s march of the riot leaders to Indianapolis, wrote his friend Senator John Tipton in March of 1836 criticizing the delay in recognition of his services and the pittance offer of \$1 per day for his troubles.<sup>67</sup> Murray chastised the governor, canal commissioners, and the legislature for failing to act. “No reward but that of ingratitude has been meted out to the Citizens who prevented the intended Massacre of last July,” Murray wrote. “Some small provision was made by the Legislature but money and thanks are both locked up yet. All was done in a whisper. This is a Miserable policy

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<sup>64</sup> “100 Dollars Reward,” *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 11 September 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>65</sup> *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 18 September 1835.

<sup>66</sup> Governor Noah Noble Message to the Legislature, in 1835, Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 418-419.

<sup>67</sup> Nellie Armstrong Robinson and Dorothy Riker, eds., *The John Tipton Papers, Vol.III, 1834-1839*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1942), 250n.

. . . The Gov. hides behind the Comrs [canal commissioners] and the Comrs behind the screen of expediency.”<sup>68</sup>

The actions of the militia, citizens, Father Lalumiere, and David Burr allowed for a peaceable enough coexistence between the Corkonians and Fardowns that construction on the Wabash and Erie resumed. The laborers returned to their work with only Jeremiah Sullivan sentenced to prison time. Neither David Burr’s letter to the governor or newspaper accounts report deaths in the Wabash and Erie riot, but other sources indicate casualties. In a speech given to the Indiana legislature, Senator John Dumont declared that, “Sixteen or seventeen Irishmen fell there, and were buried in the earth, the victims of vice and ignorance.”<sup>69</sup> Dumont likely exaggerated the numbers to suit his objective; he argued in his speech that Indiana’s internal improvement system brought undesirable immigrants to the state. Contemporary diarist Sanford Cox claims three men died.<sup>70</sup>

Indiana newspapers failed to record any additional instances of Wabash and Erie feuding. First person accounts, however, tell a different story. Sanford C. Cox accidentally waded into an aftershock of the affray when he took a leisurely boat ride to the canal town of Peru and witnessed the Irish involved in at least “eight or ten fights progressing at the same time.”<sup>71</sup> Locals informed Cox that the surliness of the Irish canal hands stemmed from leftover animosities relating to the Wabash and Erie riot that occurred the prior week.<sup>72</sup> A year later, Elijah Hackelman wrote of feuding between the secret societies that he witnessed during his journey between Logansport and Wabash.

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<sup>68</sup> Elias Murray to Senator John Tipton, March 1836, in Nellie Armstrong Robinson and Dorothy Riker, eds., *The John Tipton Papers, Vol. III, 1834-1839*, 249-250.

<sup>69</sup> “In Senate,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 28 January 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>70</sup> Sanford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* (Lafayette, IN: Courier Stram Book and Job Printing House, 1860), 146.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

Hackelman noted that he “found hands at work on the canal on almost every alternate section” and witnessed a “real Irish Riot.”<sup>73</sup> The row began when Hackelman’s party heard loud and boisterous talk coming from a laborer’s shanty. The laborers in the area soon came running, with Hackelman expressing that “the noise and confusion made, I have never heard surpassed.”<sup>74</sup> Hackelman’s party stopped to watch the fight but “clubs and other missiles, began to fly so freely, that we were compelled to leave the road and go some distance around to regain the same and left them still quarreling and fighting.”<sup>75</sup>

That these lesser-known fights avoided the same widespread media coverage that the July 10, 1835, Wabash and Erie Riot received is a testament both to the scale of that particular riot and to the fact that citizens were directly threatened. Indiana citizens appear to have condoned, or at least ignored, canal laborer violence so long as it remained confined to the Irish. The threat of such violence finding its way into Indiana towns, however, kept local citizens vigilant. Sanford C. Cox recalled the “citizens of Peru were in constant fear that the Irish, who were much more numerous than the citizens of the town, would rise and sack the village, as they had frequently threatened to do, and kill all of the inhabitants.”<sup>76</sup> This fear manifested in 1835 when townspeople heard gunshots and someone yelling “murder” in an Irish brogue coming from the vicinity of the local general store. Citizens, convinced that an Irish laborer invasion had commenced, formed a posse, armed themselves, and carefully approached the store. What the posse discovered inside served to both anger and relieve them.<sup>77</sup> The offenders

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<sup>73</sup> Margaret K. Fox, Betty Ann Wilson, Anna M. Harvery, eds., *Elijah Hackelman Scrapbook* (Kokomo, IN: Selby Publishing & Printing, 1987), 240.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Sanford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley*, 148.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*



were not Irish, but “drunken revelers” who organized the ruse as cover for their theft of whiskey from the store. The posse arrested the participants and they spent several weeks in the Logansport lock up for inciting the fear of the town.<sup>78</sup>

Disruptions on the same scale as the July 1835 riot never again occurred on the Wabash and Erie, but the periodic eruption of disturbances in other areas of the state show that the rivalry was far from dead in Indiana. The Central Canal running through Indianapolis also experienced secret society disruption, albeit on a much smaller scale. In March of 1837, a fight between secret society members broke out five miles north of present-day downtown Indianapolis. Six Corkonians tangled with three Fardowns, including a contractor named Sheridan who died from his wounds. The other two Fardowns suffered substantial injuries. The authorities made quick arrests and the prosecution pointed their finger at Corkonian Thomas Finch as the party responsible for Sheridan’s death.<sup>79</sup>

Attorney Calvin Fletcher served as defense counsel for Finch. Fletcher, an influential early citizen of Indianapolis and a meticulous diarist, took a liking to his client and recorded his impressions. While Fletcher’s personal comments about Thomas Finch add little to the big picture of the story of Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana, they are relevant in that they are a rare source offering a sympathetic portrait of an individual participant in Indiana’s Irish Wars. Fletcher found Finch to be a “young Irishman of the common grade with great vivacity & apparent good intintion [sic] & indeed with a good character.”<sup>80</sup> Fletcher described Finch as a man of “good countenance” and “a warm heart” who killed Sheridan in self-defense. Fletcher’s account indicates that Sheridan’s

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>79</sup> (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 25 March 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>80</sup> Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, Vol. I: 1817-1838*, 448.

crew of Fardowns attacked Finch's employer (a rival contractor to Sheridan), and the Corkonians attacked the Fardowns in reprisal and in an effort to protect their boss.<sup>81</sup> During the four days of trial, Fletcher offered Finch a spirited defense, including closing remarks lasting three and a half hours. Despite the flowery oratory, Thomas Finch received a five-year sentence for manslaughter.<sup>82</sup>

Southern Indiana proved not to be immune to the Corkonian and Fardown feuds that plagued the northern parts of the state. Indiana's first railroad, the Madison and Indianapolis, joined the canal projects as part of Indiana's large-scale commitment to internal improvements. Railroad contractors competed for the same labor pool as the canal contractors, resulting in Irish immigrants performing much of the actual construction. Corkonians and Fardowns building the rail battled for access to jobs and superiority just a few months after the Central Canal incident in 1837.

The Fardowns initially held a strong numerical advantage, if not a monopoly, on the laborer positions on the Madison and Indianapolis. A slow influx of Corkonians threatened to disrupt this numerical dominance. The *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* estimated at the time of the most notable disturbance on the railroad in August of 1837 that the line consisted of 1,700 workers of whom only 300 pledged allegiance to the Corkonians.<sup>83</sup> To the Fardowns, that was 300 more Corkonians than needed. As was the case along the Wabash and Erie, the influx of members from a rival secret society precipitated a violent response from those already established in laboring positions.

The recorded history of the August 1837 riot in Vernon, Indiana is vague. A report of the riot reportedly appeared in the *Vernon (IN) Banner* in the immediate

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> "Riot on the Railroad," *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 9 September 1837, NCUSNP.

aftermath, but copies of the newspaper have not survived. Local histories of Vernon recount the information from the newspaper. From the brief accounts available, the scene occurred in the following way. The Fardowns, fearful of the influx of Corkonians, attacked their adversaries somewhere between two bridges on the rail line in hopes of driving off their competitors. The ensuing brawl left one Corkonian dead and a few others wounded. A posse appointed by the local sheriff searched the work camps and shanties, ultimately arresting several Fardowners found with bloodstains on their clothing.<sup>84</sup>

The Fardowners threatened to break their compatriots out of the local jail, creating hysteria in the homes of Vernon. Rumors of a Fardown attack on the town and jail caused citizens to sleep with weapons at the ready. Several days later the Fardowns appeared on the outskirts of town where they met the militia and armed citizens who stopped them at a nearby creek. One of the locals challenged the Fardowns, yelling at those gathered on the other side of the water that the “first man who set foot in the creek was a dead man.”<sup>85</sup> A brief stalemate ensued until the Fardowns agreed to a meeting with several of the gathered citizens and an influential contractor named Flanigan who counseled the Fardowns to back down. Peace returned to the line temporarily.<sup>86</sup> The *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, perhaps now immune to reports of violent activity among Irish laborers in their state, confined their reporting of the incident to less than one hundred words.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Lori S. Ammerman, April Nicole Compton, Meredith L. Ertel, and Caroline Pabody Frost, *Reminiscences of Vernon: Stories from the Early Days of Vernon, Indiana* (Indiana: Jennings County Historical Society, 2002), 11; Thomas P. Conroy, *St. Michael's Catholic Church, Madison, Indiana: A Pioneer Parish of Southern Indiana, 1837-1937* (Indianapolis: Archdiocese of Indianapolis, 1937), 28-29;

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> “Riot on the Railroad,” *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 9 September 1837, NCUSNP.

The Corkonians were not as willing to remove themselves from the Madison and Indianapolis line as the Fardowns had hoped. In at least one counter attack, the Corkonians exacted a measure of revenge. Several Corkonians murdered a Fardown man, Patrick Gallully, on August 27. Corkonians Michael Brennen and Martin Crotty received death sentences the following month. The presiding judge, Miles C. Egleston, concluded the sentencing by admonishing Brennen and Crotty to “make preparation, from fatal necessity [sic], to meet death with its fearful consequences, and closed with the usual invocation of divine mercy on their souls.”<sup>88</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the trial, rumors circulated that Governor Noah Noble might commute the Corkonians’ death sentences. Father Michael Shaw, a priest based in Madison, worked to obtain a reprieve for the condemned men.<sup>89</sup> John Vawter, a member of the Indiana legislature from Vernon, wrote to Noble imploring the governor to keep the sentences in place as a deterrent to future outbreaks of violence. Vawter declared the murders to be the result of a “most wanton attack by 5 Corkomans [sic] on an unoffending Fardow [sic] all of Irish burth [sic].”<sup>90</sup> Vawter also argued to the governor that Jennings County judges would not agree to sign any petition suggesting a reduced sentence, and that swift justice was imperative to establishing “peace and quiet of the labourers on the line of Public works.”<sup>91</sup>

Governor Noble was unmoved by Vawter’s plea and Vawter’s information concerning the judge’s refusal to sign a petition for commuting the sentence was

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<sup>88</sup> “The Jennings Circuit Court,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 7 October 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>89</sup> John R.G. Hassard, *The Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., First Archbishop of New York, With Excerpts From His Private Correspondence* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1866), 259.

<sup>90</sup> Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 560-561.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

apparently inaccurate. The *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* reported on October 21, 1837, that the death sentence passed on Brennen and Crotty “has been commuted by the Governor to imprisonment for life.” Contrary to Vawter’s prediction, the deciding factors in commuting the sentence curiously came from the recommendations of the “President and Associate Judges, a portion of the jury by whom the prisoners were sentenced, the Clerk, Sheriff, and a number of citizens of Jennings County.”<sup>92</sup> Vawter was not alone in his disappointment at the Governor’s actions. A Fardown mob, angry at the outcome, turned on Michael Shawe (the priest spearheading the efforts to spare Brennen and Crotty), who narrowly escaped.<sup>93</sup>

The optimistic climate that created the canal system and the first railroad in Indiana gave way to sober realities by the end of the 1830s. Paul Fatout’s assertion that “The mammoth Hoosier system of internal improvements was conceived in madness and nourished by delusion” speaks to the failure of the Indiana legislature in accurately projecting the costs associated with the project they envisioned.<sup>94</sup> Multiple factors impeded the progress of the canals, including a recession in 1837, the state’s inability to pay the interest on the canal loans, and new canal construction in Illinois siphoning away the labor pool. By 1839, the board of internal improvements ordered a halt to all projects with the exception of a few unfinished sections of the Wabash and Erie Canal and the Madison to Indianapolis Railroad.<sup>95</sup> Without available work, the Corkonians and Fardowns left Indiana in a much quieter manner than they had announced their arrival.

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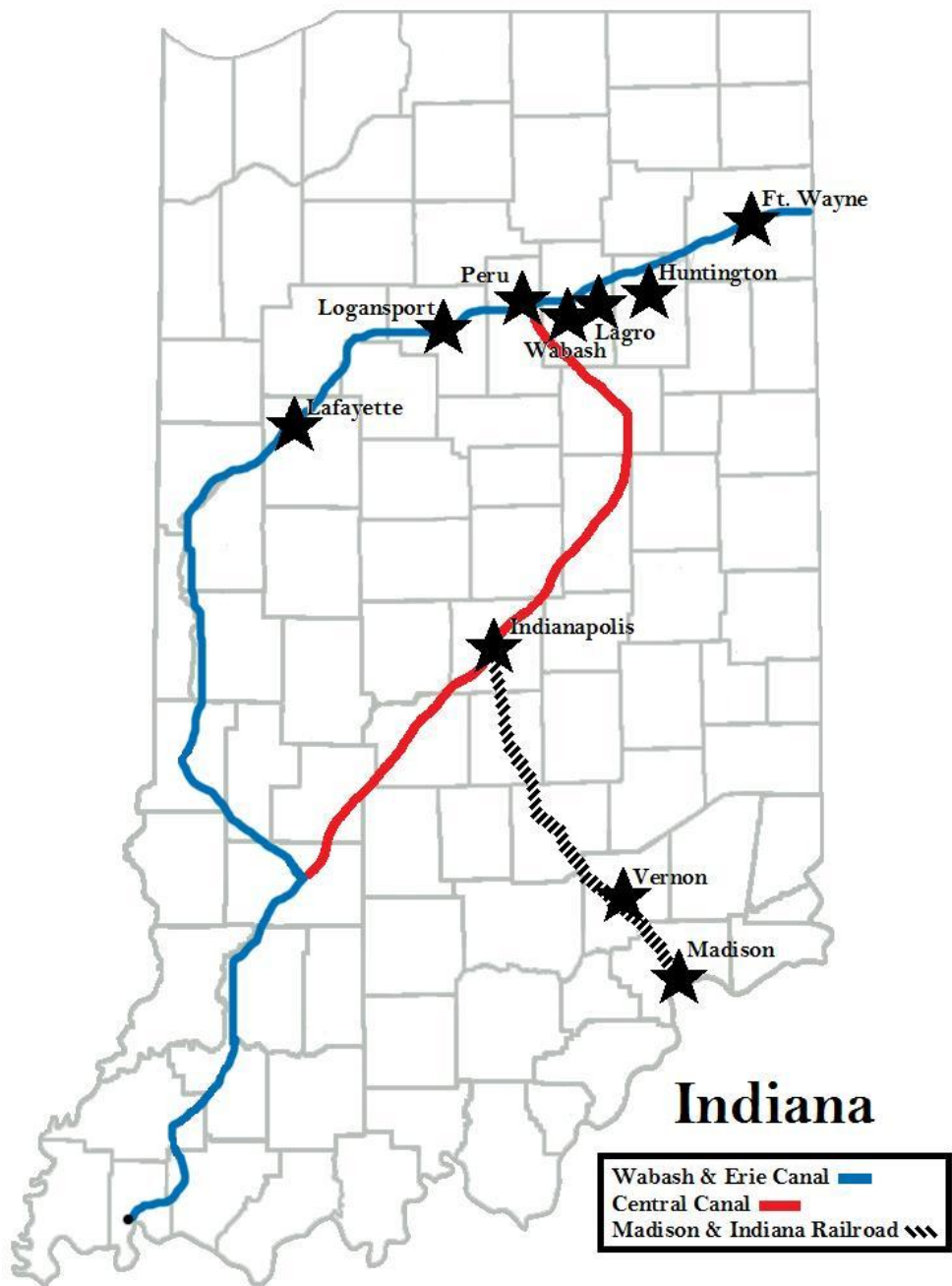
<sup>92</sup> *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 21 October 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>93</sup> John R.G. Hassard, *The Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., First Archbishop of New York*, 259.

<sup>94</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 76.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Figure 4: Map of Indiana Internal Improvements and Geographic References



## CHAPTER IV

### CORKONIANS AND FARDOWNS IN PERSPECTIVE

When the authors of Indiana history books discuss the Indiana Irish Wars, two predominant themes arise as to the cause of Corkonian and Fardown hostility. First, some authors reduce the Irish to unpleasant caricatures and stereotypes suggesting that they possessed a natural inclination towards random violence. One such author, Paul Fatout, declared that the Irish on the Wabash and Erie “were such rough fellows that settlers were as much afraid of these white savages as they were of the red” and that the Irish “staved off boredom by the usual pastime of clubbing each other over the head smartly.”<sup>1</sup> The second common theme is religious sectarianism. The true nature of the hostilities between Corkonians and Fardowns is much more complex. The tenuous financial condition of Indiana’s internal improvement projects meant that unemployment consistently threatened the laborers’ existence. With little recourse available to ensure that employment remained steady, the secret societies sought to control their work in one of the few ways available to them. According to Peter Way, “workers realized that control of the labour force was their most potent weapon in dealing with contractors and the canal company.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Catherine Tobin concluded that Corkonian and Fardown conflict “was mainly labor related; they usually operated as closed-shop organizations to keep members of the other group from work on a particular section or a whole line.”<sup>3</sup> In the case of the two large clashes between secret societies in Indiana, the Wabash and Erie Canal riot and the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad riot, open hostilities only began

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 82 and 85.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 216.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 171.

when new laborers arrived at the construction sites, threatening the job security of those already entrenched. The Wabash and Erie riot erupted only after the arrival of new numbers to the Fardowns ranks increased the total number of hands on the canal.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the Madison and Indianapolis riot, the tables turned when newly arrived Corkonians threatened the dominance of the Fardowns. A rapid influx of laborers directly threatened the livelihoods of laborers already established at those sites. In addition, new arrivals flooding the labor force threatened to depress wages due to simple application of the laws of supply and demand.

How then did religion become synonymous with the Corkonians and Fardowns fighting in Indiana? The answer appears to be a case of over-interpretation by the first historians analyzing the Wabash and Erie Canal riot, with the misconception continually repeated ever since. David Burr's letter to Governor Noah Noble does not mention religion, but newspaper reports, while failing to directly address religion, did identify a coincidence of dates that are suggestive of a religious backdrop to the fighting. In reporting on the riot, an article originally credited to the *Fort Wayne (IN) Sentinel* and published in the *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* noted, "The contest was intended to have taken place on the 12<sup>th</sup> inst. the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne."<sup>5</sup> The July 12, 1690, Battle of the Boyne holds symbolic importance to Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. When King James II, a Catholic, succeeded to the throne in 1685, he faced a challenge from the Protestant William of Orange. The forces of William of Orange defeated the armies of James II on the banks of Ireland's Boyne River. William of

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<sup>4</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 419.

<sup>5</sup> "Disturbances on the Canal," *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 31 July 1835, NCUSNP.



Orange assumed the throne as King William III.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of the battle resulted in increased and lasting religious sectarianism as the “Catholic defeat was total, and vindictive Irish Protestants took care it remained so.”<sup>7</sup>

The Battle of the Boyne remains even today a seminal event in Irish History. By referencing the Battle of the Boyne in the article, the *Fort Wayne (IN) Sentinel* and the *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal* inadvertently implied that the Irish War was a battle between Catholics and Protestants to later historians. It is possible, even likely, that Corkonians and Fardowns on the Wabash and Erie purposely selected Boyne’s anniversary given its historical significance. However, it is misinterpretation to suggest the opposing factions selected the date based on its connections to religious sectarianism. This misinterpretation dates at least as far back as Logan Esarey’s *Internal Improvements in Early Indiana*, written in 1912.<sup>8</sup> As shown in previous chapters, both the Corkonians and Fardowns originated in areas that were heavily Catholic. As further evidence that participants in Indiana’s Irish Wars and other Corkonian and Fardown feuds were Catholic, the only actors that consistently held influence in brokering peace among the laborers were priests. Father Simon Lalumiere helped negotiate an end to hostilities on the Wabash and Erie.<sup>9</sup> Father John McElroy calmed secret society members during disturbances on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.<sup>10</sup> A Father McDonagh intervened during riots on the Welland Canal, going so far as to draw a dividing line between the warring parties and threatening snaps from his

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<sup>6</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 21-22; George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 24-28.

<sup>7</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Logan J. Esarey, *Internal Improvements in Early Indiana*, 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew E. Mason, ““The Hands here Are Disposed to be Turbulent,”” 260; Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 191.

riding crop and the “curse of the Church” on any who disobeyed.<sup>11</sup> A second priest on the Welland Canal, Father Roman, convinced Fardowns not to destroy a Corkonian-frequented business in 1842.<sup>12</sup> When riots broke out on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, the citizens bemoaned Father Raho’s absence because they believed that only the priest had the power to pacify the laborers.<sup>13</sup> The secret societies lacked respect for government or employer authority, but Catholic priests represented the only authority that stood a chance of establishing control when construction sites turned into battlefields.

If the Corkonians and Fardowns were predisposed to rioting as a means of confronting the specific work and social issues confronting their survival, they were by no means alone. The antebellum years, and specifically the years associated with the presidency of Andrew Jackson, experienced rioting as a regular fixture of daily life. Carl E. Prince found that in the years of 1834 and 1835 there were at least twenty-four riotous events severe enough to garner national headlines.<sup>14</sup> Categorizing these riots is exceedingly difficult given the diverse nature of the actions. In addition to Corkonian and Fardown feuding in Maryland and Indiana, the years 1834 and 1835 witnessed race riots, labor riots, bank riots, and election riots with roots in ethnic hatred, class tension, economic grievances, and religious animosity. The Corkonian and Fardown feuding in Indiana ended with only handful of confirmed deaths, but other communities were not so lucky. At least sixty-one fatalities occurred nationally during riots in 1835 alone.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 161; Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 196.

<sup>12</sup> “The Row at St. Catherines, U.C.,” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, 14 July 1842, NCUSNP.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Tobin, “The Lowly Muscular Digger,” 160-161.

<sup>14</sup> Carl E. Prince, “The Great Riot Year: Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (Spring 1985), 13.

<sup>15</sup> David Grimstead, “Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting,” *American Historical Review* 77 (April 1972), 364.

Jacksonian-era riots, while often shocking, did little to alter the political landscape. David Grimstead's examination of Jacksonian-era rioting asserts that riots and mobs "functioned more as an accepted part of the political structure than an attack on it, largely because authorities unofficially recognized their legitimacy so long as they acted within certain bounds."<sup>16</sup> These unofficial parameters protected rioters and mobs so long as they directed their actions towards groups equally marginalized or less socially influential, as opposed to aiming their actions towards entrenched powers.<sup>17</sup> It was only when mob actions threatened the stability of more powerful groups or established citizens that authorities attempted to break up mobs and riots. Such was the case for Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana. Local authorities sat by passively, either ignoring or tolerating violence, so long as members of secret societies threatened only each other. Authorities only intervened during the 1835 Wabash and Erie riot when work ceased and when the Irish factions threatened citizens by stealing weapons. During the 1837 riot near Vernon, authorities initially made only nominal arrests, but townspeople organized against the mobs when secret societies threatened to attack the jail. Scholar Michael Feldberg's review of riots in Philadelphia during this same period asserts that the chief outcome of Jacksonian-era rioting was not political upheaval, but the installation of paramilitary-style police departments.<sup>18</sup>

Paul A. Gilje's study, *Rioting in America*, shows that immigrants featured prominently in nineteenth-century rioting, usually in the form of immigrants battling anti-immigrant Anglo-Americans. Ethnic groups also regularly battled each other, often

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 390-392.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 120-125.

against the backdrop of competition for access to jobs.<sup>19</sup> The Irish, as the most prominent immigrant group of the era, regularly battled other immigrants in addition to Anglo-American nativists.<sup>20</sup> Gilje notes of Irish immigrant riots that contemporary “commentators failed to recognize the American roots of this violence.”<sup>21</sup> While Gilje is correct, his study excludes riots involving Corkonians and Fardowns, and notes the phenomena of hostilities between members of the same immigrant group only in relation to rival Chinese gangs that periodically battled in the decades after the Civil War.<sup>22</sup> The exclusion of Corkonian and Fardown feuding in Gilje’s study is a subtle acknowledgment of the exceptional nature of the Irish Wars and their Irish, rather than American, roots.

The citizenry expressed fear and surprise while riots occurred, but an easily distracted general population exhibited a short attention span when riots concluded. Inspired by the tumultuous events of the Wabash and Erie riot, the *Logansport (IN) Canal Telegraph* published an editorial on the dangerous level of riot activity sweeping the nation. The editorial warned that when “discords and quarrels, and factions, are carried on openly and audaciously, it is a sign the reverence is lost, and if measures are not effectively taken to arrest those troubles, and revive that reverence, the government itself must soon be destroyed.”<sup>23</sup> While the editorial overstates the outcomes of Jacksonian-era riots and mob actions, it represents the brevity in which the Irish War along the Wabash and Erie Canal captivated the public attention. The editorial, coming one month after the militia established relative peace on the Wabash and Erie Canal amounted to the last commentary, direct or indirect, on the riot published by a newspaper

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<sup>19</sup> Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 126-130.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69, 91-92.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> *Logansport (IN) Canal Telegraph*, 8 August 1835, ISLNC.

located just thirty miles from the site of the riot. Such a reaction was not atypical. David Grimstead points to this as the normal reaction of communities to Jacksonian-era rioting where “for a day or two after a riot some papers explored the specific situation and the general problems; a week later...it would be publicly forgotten. The riot had regained its eighteenth-century status as a frequent tacitly accepted if not approved mode of behavior.”<sup>24</sup>

The outcomes of the Indiana Irish Wars in terms of policy change, legislative action, and punishment of participants bears out Grimstead’s conclusion. In the immediate aftermath of the Wabash and Erie Canal riot, Governor Noah Noble joined the chorus expressing indignation and clamoring for law and order. Noble had a reputation for believing in harsh punishment for criminal offenders. Diarist Elijah Hackelman witnessed Noble, then the Franklin County Sheriff, whip a man in the public square of Brookville in 1820 for stealing.<sup>25</sup> When the legislature convened at the end of 1835, Noah Noble used the canal affray to lobby for stiffer punishment for riotous behavior. Noah’s address to the legislature outlined his goals for the session, including:

During the past summer the foreign laborers upon the line of canal resuscitated some of their old party animosities, which so often were the cause of collision in their native country, Ireland; and while under great excitement, from five to seven hundred on a side assembled for several days armed for battle, to the great terror of the citizens of that vicinity. To prevent reoccurrences of the evil, the punishment known to our criminal laws, for riotous conduct, should be increased in proportion to such offences.<sup>26</sup>

While the legislature responded to the governor’s request, the result was hardly a frontier version of “tough on crime” legislation. The legislature passed a weak law in

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<sup>24</sup> David Grimstead, “Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting,” 364.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret K. Fox, Betty Ann Wilson, Anna M. Harvery, eds., *Elijah Hackelman Scrapbook*, 117.

<sup>26</sup> “Governor’s Message,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 8 December 1835, NCUSNP.

February of 1836 that served only to give courts the discretion to assess fines “with or without imprisonment” for those “deemed guilty of a riot.”<sup>27</sup> The legislation may have been a balancing act recognizing the real possibility of laborers rioting again against the financial realities of maintaining a large enough labor supply available to work to depress wages to an acceptable level. Even though canal contractors developed a blacklist of known leaders of each faction and forbid their hiring on future canal contracts, the lack of stiff penalties reflect Grimstead’s notion that eighteenth-century riots were accepted (if not approved) behavior.<sup>28</sup>

David J. Bodenhamer’s study of frontier courts in Indiana indicates that only one out of three criminal defendants received convictions during these years.<sup>29</sup> However, all four of the known members of Irish secret societies tried in Indiana courts spent time in the state penitentiary; a fact that owes more to anti-Irish sentiment than a belief that rioting deserved severe punishment. Jeremiah Sullivan, convicted in 1835 for an attempt on the life of a canal contractor during the Wabash and Erie riot, received a sentence of life in prison. Thomas Finch, convicted of manslaughter in his attack on the Fardown Sheridan on the Central Canal in 1837, received five years in prison.<sup>30</sup> Martin Crotty and Michuel Brennen, convicted of Fardown Patrick Galluly’s murder in 1837 during the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad riot, initially received hanging sentences.<sup>31</sup> Crotty

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<sup>27</sup> Indiana General Assembly, *Laws of Indiana: Laws of a General Nature Passed and Published at the Twentieth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis: Bolton and Emmons, 1836), 63.

<sup>28</sup> David Burr to Governor Noah Noble, 30 December 1835, in Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Messages and Papers relating to the Administration of Noah Noble*, 423; David Grimstead, “Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting,” 364.

<sup>29</sup> David J. Bodenhamer, “Law and Disorder on the Early Frontier: Marion County, Indiana, 1823-1850,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 10 (July 1979), 335.

<sup>30</sup> Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, Vol. I: 1817-1838*, 449.

<sup>31</sup> “The Jennings Circuit Court,” *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 7 October 1837, NCUSNP; *(Indianapolis) Indiana Journal*, 21 October 1837, NCUSNP.

and Brennen avoided death by a last minute reprieve from Governor Noble. Coincidentally, the gubernatorial power used by Noble to commute the sentences came from the same law passed that nominally increased punishment for riot participants.<sup>32</sup>

Sullivan, Finch, Crotty, and Brennen, all Corkonians, served prison terms at the Jeffersonville penitentiary at the same time, but they likely had little opportunity to find solace in the presence of others who shared their experiences. The bleak day-to-day existence of prison life during this period combined religious training, long work hours, and separation from other prisoners. If they were model prisoners, they could have worked in various vocations such as that of a blacksmith, wagon maker, or brick maker unfettered. If they demonstrated unruliness, prisoners labored at these tasks attached to leg chains. When not working, prisoners remained in solitary confinement with a prison-provided Bible to reflect on their misdeeds. Meals rarely deviated from a diet of pickled pork, corn bread, and potatoes.<sup>33</sup> Despite Governor Noah Noble's insistence that "the punishment known to our criminal laws, for riotous conduct, should be increased" in the aftermath of the Wabash and Erie Riot, the seemingly harsh sentences for the Corkonian offenders ultimately proved temporary. Sullivan walked away from Jeffersonville and his life sentence with a full pardon from Governor Samuel Bigger in 1840, having served five years.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Finch had his five-year sentence reduced to three years when Bigger pardoned him in 1840.<sup>35</sup> Crotty and Brennen received the biggest break of all;

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<sup>32</sup> Indiana General Assembly, *Laws of Indiana: Laws of a General Nature Passed and Published at the Twentieth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana*, 63; (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 21 October 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>33</sup> "State Prison," (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 3 February 1835, NCUSNP.

<sup>34</sup> *Pardons and Remissions, Vol. I.*, 6 July 1840, Indiana State Archives Manuscript Collection (ISAMC).

<sup>35</sup> *Pardons and Remissions, Vol. I.*, 15 May 1840, ISAMC.

having their sentence commuted from hanging to life in prison, then receiving full pardons after serving just six years.<sup>36</sup>

While the Corkonian and Fardown feuds did not result in tougher enforcement of Indiana laws, the arrival of Irish laborers did bring lasting changes to the state in other areas. Irish laborers on canals and railroads represented to the first wave of Irish Catholic immigrants to live in Indiana. The majority did not stay, leaving the state in pursuit of jobs on other sites after funding for Indiana's internal improvements evaporated, and presumably participating in continuations of the secret society feuds. Yet some of the laborers did stay in Indiana. One example of a laborer who stayed is Dennis Coughan, a likely participant in the Wabash and Erie riot. Coughan filed a "declaration of intention" for citizenship dated September 1, 1835, in Huntington. The declaration renounced Coughan's allegiance to King William IV, stated he was "born in the county of Cork [and] province of Munster in Ireland" and listed his current occupation as "a labourer upon the Wabash & Erie Canal."<sup>37</sup> By 1850, Irish immigrants made up 3.1 percent of the state's population. While 3.1 percent is a seemingly small population percentage, Indiana had fewer foreign-born inhabitants than any other state in the Old Northwest.<sup>38</sup> Thus those veterans of the Indiana Irish Wars who remained in the state, such as Dennis Coughan, altered Indiana's demographic makeup.

Areas of the state where heavy construction of canals, roads, and railroads occurred not surprisingly had the highest concentrations of Irish immigrants.<sup>39</sup> These

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<sup>36</sup> *Pardons and Remissions, Vol. I*, 19 July 1843, ISAMC.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald Woodward, *Irish Sources of Wabash County* (Huntington, IN: Wabash County Historical Society, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory S. Rose, "The Distribution of Indiana's Ethnic and Racial Minorities in 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History* 87 (September 1991), 225-236. The 1850 census is the first census recording reliable numbers for foreign-born population.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.



same locales also witnessed the first seeds of organized Catholicism in Indiana. While priests ministered to a small statewide Catholic community before the arrival of Irish laborers, the first wave of church construction coincided with the arrival of the secret societies. Only four priests ministered to the entire state in 1834, but over the next five years Catholic places of worship sprang up regularly.<sup>40</sup> Wabash and Erie laborers built St. Patrick's Church in Lagro in 1838 when a benevolent contractor donated two lots for the religious use of his hired hands.<sup>41</sup> The first church of any denomination built in Ft. Wayne also served Catholic canal hands on the Wabash and Erie.<sup>42</sup> On the Madison to Indiana Railroad, local lore holds that when the 1837 construction of Madison's St. Michael's church began, Irish railroad workers recycled stone blasted from the construction of an inclined plane to use in constructing the walls of the church.<sup>43</sup>

The growth of immigrants and Catholicism resulted in an increase in nativist reaction by Indiana citizens. James Chute, a Protestant minister in Fort Wayne during the years of the building of the Wabash and Erie, decried the impact of immigrants on his city. Chute wrote to an acquaintance, "The influx of Irish and Dutch has added nothing to the *moral power* of our community."<sup>44</sup> In addition to objecting to the Catholicism of the immigrants, the violence of the secret societies contributed to a public perception of immigrants as purveyors of vice.

One politician, John Dumont, attempted to use this perception of immigrants for political gain as early as 1837. As the finances deteriorated for Indiana's internal improvements, the legislature undertook debate on the proper course of action for

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<sup>40</sup> William W. Giffin, *The Irish: Peopling Indiana*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Ronald Woodward, *Irish Sources of Wabash County*, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 144-145.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas P. Conroy, *St. Michael's Catholic Church, Madison, Indiana*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Charles R. Poinsette, *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era*, 140.

finishing the projects already started. Indiana initially scattered its resources by attempting simultaneous construction of multiple canals and a railroad. This process required dividing funds, supervisors, and labor to the extent that progress slowed at each site. A movement to create a hierarchy of projects with resources directed to one or two priority projects at a time emerged. The “classification” movement gained momentum in 1837 as proponents argued that focusing energies on one or two projects would result in quicker completion, reduced expenditures, and less state debt.<sup>45</sup> Dumont, a member of the senate and a candidate for governor, made scapegoats of the Corkonians, Fardowns, and immigrants in general while arguing in favor of classification. The commentary of such politicians masked naked anti-immigrant sentiments in a cloak of fiscal responsibility. Dumont addressed the legislature in 1837 arguing that constructing multiple works at the same time would increase the demand for labor and thus increase the cost.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Dumont warned, “Foreigners, of the lowest and most ignorant classes will be the majority of the laborers. Some French, some Germans, and some Irish emigrants will fill up the lines.”<sup>47</sup> The Irish particularly worried Dumont. He used the specter of future “little armies” comprised of “Fardowns and Cork mans [sic]” turning the construction sites into “fields of slaughter” as the core of his argument.<sup>48</sup> Dumont’s speech in favor of canal classification concluded by arguing that continuing with the current internal improvements plan would solicit “ignorant emigrants” that could bring “lasting injury to the country.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana: From Its Exploration to 1850* (Indianapolis, IN: W.K. Stewart, 1915), 367-375; Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals*, 85-86.

<sup>46</sup> “In Senate,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Journal*, 28 January 1837, NCUSNP.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

John Dumont lost the 1838 governor's race but his statements linking Corkonians and Fardowns to immigrants degrading Indiana echoed the comments of political leaders across the country. In 1837, the nativist mayor of New York City blamed an atmosphere of violence on the behavior of "mischievous strangers" from other nations who incited riots and strikes.<sup>50</sup> These leaders foreshadowed a later nativist political movement. This new movement, that of the "Know Nothings," inadvertently aided in the breakup of the strict regional ties found in Irish immigrants who in turn forged a new Irish identity. The American Party, more commonly known by its nickname the "Know Nothings" (so called because the secretive members replied, "I know nothing" when asked about the group's activities), opposed immigration of all nationalities. Because the Irish represented the majority of immigrants at this time, the Know Nothings directed most of their enmity at Irish immigrants. The height of the Know Nothings' popularity, the mid-1850s, coincided with the mass arrival of immigrants from Ireland in the wake of the potato famine.

The Indiana version of the Know Nothings started in southern Indiana 1854 and grew quickly. By the mid 1850s, the national leaders estimated the Indiana branch had 30,000 members.<sup>51</sup> As William W. Giffin states, "Anti-Catholic attitudes were common in early nineteenth-century Indiana, and such attitudes intensified as the state's Catholic population increased as attacks were made on the Catholic Church."<sup>52</sup> This anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant attitude periodically turned into attacks on Irish immigrants in Indiana

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<sup>50</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door*, 260.

<sup>51</sup> Carl Fremont Brand, "The History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," in *Indiana Magazine of History Vol. XVIII* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1922), 58-61.

<sup>52</sup> William W. Giffin, *The Irish: Peopling Indiana*, 48.

and elsewhere, usually coinciding with election days where nativists accused the Irish of voting repeatedly.<sup>53</sup>

Although Indiana had relatively few immigrants and Catholics compared to states in the East, Know Nothings grew strong in Indiana in the twenty years after the Corkonian and Fardown riots. Indiana's constitution permitted residents, including those yet to obtain American citizenship, to vote in elections. Nativists argued that this proviso gave the immigrants undue political influence. To combat immigrant power at the ballot box, Indiana's Know Nothings added anti-slavery and temperance planks to their platform to broaden the party's appeal.<sup>54</sup> As a result of this "big tent" approach, "Know Nothings in Indiana enjoyed an appeal unmatched anywhere else in the Midwest," according to historian Tyler Anbinder.<sup>55</sup> In 1854, candidates supported by the secretive Know Nothings won nine of Indiana's eleven congressional seats.<sup>56</sup> While Know Nothing political success in Indiana resulted from smart political maneuvering, citizen familiarity with accounts of the inter-Irish conflicts on Indiana's canals and railroads certainly nourished the anti-Irish roots of the movement.

The anti-immigration politics of the Know Nothings failed to amount to sustained political success nationally (and only fleeting success in Indiana), but the movement served an important purpose in transforming Corkonians and Fardown feuds. Nativists did not make a distinction between those from different regions of Ireland, instead they lumped all Irish Catholic immigrants into one body. Faced with aggression from outside their insular worldview of Corkonians and Fardowns, nativist oppression served to break

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 71-72.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

up Irish sectional divisions. The assault from anti-immigrant forces broke down the regional divisions of Irish immigrants who forged new national identities. As the devastation caused by the potato famine sent refugees to American shores and increased the volume of Irish immigration, the new immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s brought a view steeped in this new national Irish identity. As Kerby A. Miller states, “in nativist eyes, they [Irish immigrants] were not Dubliners or Kerry men, cottiers or strong farmers’ sons, but merely despised Irishmen who therefore must needs unite on the basis of broadly shared characteristics and experiences.”<sup>57</sup>

Corkonian and Fardown riots slowed down in the mid 1840s and became rare by the 1850s. Several factors contributed to the eradication of these intra-Irish feuds. Competing immigrant groups gained traction against the Irish monopoly on the growing number of railroads under construction. The reaction of Irish immigrants against nativist hostility helped erase territorial traditions and identifications by Irish town, county, or province. The children of the Corkonians and Fardowns, if not assimilated, straddled two different worlds, that of their parents and that of their new country. Second generation Irish immigrants had experiences that greatly differed from that of their parents and had less use for intra-Irish social divisions.<sup>58</sup> From 1850 through the end of the nineteenth century, a political nationalism movement swept Ireland. The movement flourished through the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association (promoting traditional Irish sports) and the Gaelic League (promoting the Irish language), and a revival of interest in

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<sup>57</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 328.

<sup>58</sup> David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 147.

Anglo-Irish literature.<sup>59</sup> Irish immigrants of the latter half of the century arrived with a greater sense of cohesion and national identity than those of the 1830s.

While participation in secret societies and lashing out at rival groups of laborers did not always have the impact on job preservation that Corkonians and Fardowns hoped, the organizations did plant seeds that blossomed in later years. By the 1840s, the secret societies were making the first efforts at forsaking fighting each other in order to band together to fight their employers. The tradition of secret societies securing employment through violent completion gave way to the emerging organized labor movement.<sup>60</sup> Irish in skilled labor professions as shoemakers, carpenters, and boatmen operating in urban centers regularly turned to the strike as protest against low wages and poor work conditions.<sup>61</sup> Unskilled labor such as the workers on internal improvements were more hesitant to adopt the strike, although there is some evidence that Corkonians and Fardowns working on Canadian canals banded together on several occasions in general strikes.<sup>62</sup> Irish immigrants played key roles in founding and leading the American Miners' Union in 1861. An Irish-born miner founded the largest union in the country in this period, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association. The second largest union, the Knights of St. Crispin, predominantly served Irish shoemakers. The union that later emerged out of the Knights of St. Crispin, the Knights of Labor, became the most powerful American union of the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Úna Ní Bhroiméil, *Building Irish Identity in America, 1870-1915* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Kevin Kenny, "Labor and Labor Organizations," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, eds. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 357.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>62</sup> Ruth Beasdale, "Unskilled Laborers on the Public Works of Canada, 1840-1880," (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1984), 284.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin Kenny, "Labor and Labor Organizations," in *Making the Irish American*, 358.

Corkonians and Fardowns, while atypical in that they directed the majority of their actions towards each other rather than management, represent early attempts at organizing a North American labor force. The Irish, because of both their status among the first immigrant groups and their experiences with organized attempts to influence wages and work conditions, were in an ideal place to lead the organized labor movements that developed later in the nineteenth century. As other newly arrived immigrant groups competing for jobs ate away at the Irish head start in unskilled labor throughout the century, the Irish had already established themselves as labor leaders. As the Irish proportion of the immigrant population declined, their importance in the organized labor movement increased. Between 1820 and 1855, the Irish made up over forty percent of the total foreign-born population. By the 1880s, however, that proportion decreased to sixteen percent. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Irish immigrants comprised only ten percent of the immigrant population. The Irish head start and prior experience meant that Irish-Americans headed more than fifty of the 110 unions that made up the American Federation of Labor. Many of these leaders had roots in Munster counties associated with the Corkonian such as Cork, Kerry, and Limerick.<sup>64</sup> Although Irish-Americans no longer abided by the strict regionalism that separated Corkonians and Fardowns, the lessons of the secret societies continued to prevail. As late as the 1930s, Irish-American labor leaders gave preferential treatment to their own kind; nearly all of New York's bus and subway drivers were either Irish or of Irish descent.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> David Montgomery, *The Irish Influence in the American Labor Movement* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

The feuds in Indiana did not end the Corkonian and Fardown rivalry, nor did the failures of Indiana's internal improvement dissuade other states from similar construction. Indiana's western neighbor Illinois set to work on the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1836. Two years later, Illinois would experience problems with its labor force. As Indiana's internal improvement work slowed at this same time, it is likely that at least some veterans of Indiana's riots made the convenient move to Illinois where Corkonians attempted to drive Fardowns away from canal jobs near LaSalle. In June of 1838, the Corkonian aggressors soundly defeated the Fardowns in a skirmish before setting out to destroy Fardown shanties up and down the line to ensure their rivals would not remain in the vicinity. The next day, a posse consisting of the local sheriff, townspeople, and aggravated Fardowns sought out the Corkonians, cornering them as they celebrated the previous day's victory. The posse attacked, leaving ten to fifteen Corkonians dead and dozens more arrested.<sup>66</sup>

Illinois, however, was just the immediate renewal of hostilities after Indiana's battles of 1835-1837. Irish secret societies continued to feud well into the 1850s although the frequency of such occurrences slowed by 1840.<sup>67</sup> Indiana's Catholic clergy deserve at least part of the credit for secret societies clashing with less frequency. In the aftermath of the Indiana riots, Bishop Simon Brute de Remur of Indiana wrote to Bishop Hughes in New York "begging him to devise some means of deterring emigrants when they first landed in New York from enrolling themselves in these associations, to

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<sup>66</sup> Elmer Baldwin, *History of La Salle County, Illinois* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1877), 199; Catherine Tobin, "The Lowly Muscular Digger," 185-187.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Way, *Common Labour*, 287-295.



discover their leaders, and ‘to find some way to their conscience.’”<sup>68</sup> Hughes’ pastoral letter and outspoken comments condemning secret societies on public improvements came as a response to de Remur’s request.<sup>69</sup>

The Irish tradition of secret societies continued to evolve, even after the Corkonians and Fardowns faded into obscurity. Another Irish secret society, the Molly Maguires, received fantastical media attention after a series of labor-related murders attributed to an organization of Pennsylvania anthracite miners in the 1870s. The headlines captivated the nation: the Molly Maguires “Resume Their Bloody Work in the Pennsylvania Mining Regions,” “Startling Revelations—Exposure of the Secret Workings of the Order,” and “Murderous Miners” to cite a small portion.<sup>70</sup> Twenty Molly Maguires received dates with the executioner.<sup>71</sup> The story even became the subject of a 1970 movie starring Sean Connery. As the Irish adopted a more cohesive nationalist perspective, the nature of their secret societies changed. In the 1860s and 1870s, the secret society of the Fenian Brotherhood consisting of Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans went so far as to stage two attempts at invading Canada from the United States in hopes of forcing Great Britain to grant Irish independence.<sup>72</sup>

The Corkonians and Fardowns left lasting impressions in Indiana and in other states privy to their rivalry. The lessons of secret societies and their “shillelagh and shovel” approach to canal and railroad labor extended to the Irish and non-Irish alike.

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<sup>68</sup> Sister Mary Salesia Godecker, *Simon Brute de Remur, First Bishop of Vincennes* (St. Meinard, IN: St. Meinard Historical Essays, 1931), 361-362; Sister Mary Borromeo Brown, *History of the Sisters-of-Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods* (Chicago: Benzinger Brothers, 1949), 314-315.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> “The Molly Maguires,” (*Chicago*) *Inter Ocean*, 10 September 1875, NCUSNP; “The Molly Maguires,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 10 May 1876, NCUSNP; and “Murderous Miners,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 10 May 1876, NCUSNP.

<sup>71</sup> Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 289-295.

<sup>72</sup> See W.S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975).

Nativists used the memory of Irish riots and brawls as fuel for their anti-Irish rhetoric. Conversely, Irish immigrant use of secret societies perpetuated for the next forty years in varying ways, including the labor struggles of the Molly Maguires and the Irish nationalism of the Fenian movement. In their most important legacy, the Corkonians and Fardowns exposed immigrants to forms of organized labor protest and bolstered their claims to leadership roles labor unions.

## CONCLUSION

The Irish economy and land system of the 1830s created an atmosphere ripe for emigration in the decades prior to potato famine. Ireland ranked as one of Europe's poorest countries. Overpopulation and land shortages exacerbated by an increasing tendency of property owners to shift from tillage to grazing left Irish peasants facing increased rents. A growing number of the Irish became landless or resorted to working as farm laborers, a change from their traditional practices of communal or tenant farming. Irish peasants responded to the relative powerlessness of their economic condition in two dramatic ways. Some formed secret societies such as the Ribbon Men and the Whiteboys, organizations using violence and intimidation to preserve access to land and jobs, protest rents, and halt evictions on behalf of their membership. Others joined the growing migration to North America, pioneers of an increasing trend of Irish Catholic emigration.

Despite the hardships left behind in Ireland, Irish Catholics of the 1830s were reluctant emigrants. The roots of this reluctance extends to the Irish language where the term used to describe those that left, *deoraí*, literally means "exile." Befitting for a group viewing their migration as exile, the Irish retained strong attachments to Irish culture and tradition. Irish culture and tradition at this time, however, did not include a unifying national identity. Instead, Irish immigrants in the years prior to the famine primarily identified, lived, and worked with those from their same family, county, or province.

The typical Irish immigrant of the 1830s was an unskilled laborer, unmarried, and male, all qualifications that leant themselves to a transitory existence working on North

American canals and railroads. When Indiana attempted to replicate the success of the Erie Canal by creating its own system of internal improvements starting in 1832, shortages in available hands forced the canal commissioners to import Irish immigrant laborers. With few alternatives, the Irish labored on the canals and railroads under miserable conditions. In addition to the demanding and dangerous work, canal laborers and railroad trackmen lived in decrepit shanties in socially isolated and remote lands. The threat of disease ran rampant, and employer-sanctioned alcohol abuse kept workers in an agitated state.

Dangerous work and poor living conditions were not the only threats to the laborers existence; another threat came from the regional rivalries brought from Ireland. Irish canal and railroad laborers organized into competing secret societies based upon their home regions in Ireland. These two societies, the Corkonians (representing those from County Cork and the Province of Munster) and the Fardowns (consisting of those from a pocket of Leinster and Connacht counties centered around County Longford), mimicked the Whiteboy and Ribbon Men movements of Ireland by using violence as a means of exerting control over their economic situation. Despite their shared experiences as Irish immigrants, members of the Corkonians and Fardowns regularly fought each other on internal improvement sites across the United States and Canada in hopes of securing access to jobs and increased wages. Each society had headquarters in New York City saloons, where national leaders worked in concert with organizations fronting as benevolent fraternal associations to recruit members.

The first widely reported dispute between Corkonians and Fardowns occurred near Williamsport, Maryland, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, in 1834. The battles

on the Chesapeake and Ohio served as a template for later confrontations: Corkonians and Fardowns living in mutual fear of attack from the other, followed by large-scale riots requiring militia intervention to restore peace. Fights between the two secret societies were ubiquitous to internal improvements throughout the 1830s through the 1850s.

The feud spread to Indiana starting in 1835 when veterans of the Chesapeake and Ohio conflict arrived to work on the Wabash and Erie Canal. An influx of Fardowns that year challenged the Corkonians' control of canal jobs. Such an influx threatened the livelihoods of laborers already established at those sites and threatened to depress wages. Corkonians and Fardowns attempted to drive their rivals away from the canal, engaging in brawls and night raids on encampments. By the beginning of July, the situation devolved into preparations for a massive showdown. The resulting riot involved over six hundred armed laborers gathered near Lagro. The Indiana militia arrested the participants, but the labor requirements of canal construction saw all but the ringleaders allowed to return to work. The media failed to report any additional disturbances on the Wabash and Erie, but several observers visiting the area in later weeks recorded continued feuding through the following year.

The cessation of hostilities on the Wabash and Erie did not end the feud in Indiana. In early 1837, six Corkonians and three Fardowns fought briefly on the Central Canal near Indianapolis, leaving one Fardown dead and a Corkonian sent to the penitentiary. Another full-scale riot erupted in Vernon later in 1837 on the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad, leaving multiple fatalities and two Corkonians initially sentenced to hang. Like the Wabash and Erie Riot, the Vernon episode started when an increase in laborers from a rival secret society threatened to disrupt a monopoly on available jobs.

The study of Indiana's Irish Wars to date has been incomplete, and in regards to the conclusions of the origins of the conflict, inaccurate. The existing scholarly work typically identifies religious differences as the heart of the feud, with the Corkonians and Fardowns representing transplanted religious sectarianism from Ireland. These accounts assume that the Fardowns were Protestants originating from the Province of Ulster. Yet no primary sources verify this claim. A coincidence of the date of the Wabash and Erie Canal riot with the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, a battle in Ireland that had significant religious connotations, appears to be the source of the frequent misinterpretation. Reports from Corkonian and Fardown feuds outside of Indiana clearly indicate that Fardowns came from predominantly Catholic areas of Ireland.

A more likely explanation for the source of the rivalry is the provincialism of Irish immigrants prior to the potato famine of the late 1840s. In addition to Irish immigrants organizing socially with those from the same home province or region, the people from the areas associated with the Corkonians and Fardowns shared a long rivalry in Ireland. This rivalry included Corkonian jealousy over the north's role as the center of Irish education and a Fardown perception of cowardice on the part of the Munster militia during a battle for Irish independence. Most importantly, migrant laborers from Fardown counties worked in Munster during harvest, causing competition for scarce work. The rivalry even extended to the use of the term "fardown" itself, which was originally used as an insult applied by Corkonians to those from northern counties. The term most likely came from identifying those from less mountainous regions as being "far down" from the more mountainous topography of Munster.

Riotous behavior during this era was an accepted part of the political landscape and a common form of protest. So long as rioters did not direct their actions towards more powerful or influential groups, the authorities tolerated their actions. Such was the case for Corkonians and Fardowns in Indiana. The militia and other authority only intervened when Irish brawling threatened citizens or the accepted social order. Rioting during the Jacksonian-era tended to pit marginalized ethnic, religious, or socio-economic groups against each other. The intra-ethnic aspect of the Irish-Catholic Corkonian and Fardown riots was uncommon to the conventional patterns of the day.

The punishment for those involved in the Indiana Irish Wars reinforces the idea that riots were tacitly approved actions. Despite newspaper headlines and editorials that condemned the Corkonians and Fardowns, only meager government action followed. A weak new law in response to the Wabash and Erie Canal riot only allowed judges to impose fines and consider imprisonment for rioters rather than to mandate it. Only four men received prison sentences for participating in the Indiana Irish Wars and none served their entire terms.

In the decades immediately following the Irish Wars, the feuds affected Indiana's demographic and political composition. The majority of the Corkonians and Fardowns left Indiana as their work ended to labor on new construction sites in other states. Those that stayed, however, were among the first significant immigrant groups in a state sorely lacking in foreign-born population as compared to its neighbors. Irish canal laborers and their battles in Lagro, Indianapolis, and Vernon alarmed native-born citizens, increasing anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments. Indiana politicians railed against the newcomers as scapegoats for political gain. The nativist Know Nothing movement even

enjoyed a brief period of success in Indiana, culminating in winning nine of eleven congressional seats in 1854, partly as a reaction to the legacy of intra-Irish violence on Indiana's internal improvements.

In the long term, Corkonians and Fardowns stimulated Irish involvement in organized labor. Although secret societies regularly fought each other instead of management, they still represent early collective actions to achieve employment advantages. The experiences on internal improvements gave the Irish a head start in labor organizing. Even after other immigrant groups eroded their position as the dominant immigrant group later in the century, the Irish maintained their dominance in organized labor leadership positions and influence.

Indiana-centered historians have long overlooked labor disturbances on the state's internal improvements. The Indiana Irish Wars were much more than the incidents of local color presented in Indiana history books. That historians overlooked the Corkonians and Fardowns may have much to do with the fact that their Irish heritage dictated their actions far more than their role as new or often temporary Hoosiers. As an extension of Irish traditions of faction fighting and Whiteboyism, the Indiana Irish Wars are as much pieces of Irish history as they are Indiana history.



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