

# **Irish Women in Oswego, 1855 and 1915**

by Laura Halferty

## **Preface**

The following study is an updated version of the research I completed for my M.A. in History thesis (SUNY Oswego, 2000). In this latest incarnation, it is both a look at Irish women immigrants' lives in Oswego and a narrative of my own on-going research process, which I hope will be useful to anyone else interested in tackling a difficult topic in local history.

This isn't the definitive work on Irish women in Oswego, nor is it intended to be, which is why I've avoided making statements that read like ironclad theories. A study of this sort would certainly benefit from primary sources written by Irish women and a comprehensive analysis of larger census samples. My intent here, though, was simply to begin at the beginning: to use censuses and other local history resources as a way of sketching, in broad strokes, a portrait of Oswego's Irish women immigrants and how their lives may have changed over time. With the discovery of new sources, this portrait will no doubt become more detailed in the decades to come.

## Data Collection & Sources

I began my investigation into the lives of Oswego's Irish women immigrants by collecting data for a sample of one hundred Irish women appearing in the 1855 New York State Census for the City of Oswego (by "Irish women" I mean women born in Ireland and at least eighteen years old when the census was taken). My choice of the 1855 census wasn't arbitrary: historians consider this census particularly useful because of the wealth of information it provides, including information regarding women's occupations, which didn't appear in previous censuses.

I chose one hundred as the limit of the sample because calculations would be simplified, and I recorded information for the first one hundred Irish women whose entries were complete and legible. As I collected data, I paid particular attention to a few specific categories of information because I thought they could reveal something about Irish women's lives: 1) their ages at the time the census was taken, 2) how long they had lived in America, 3) whether they were married and had children, 4) the ethnicities of their husbands, 5) whether they worked and what their occupations were, and 6) whether they lived in "Irish households" (which I'm defining as households headed by a man or woman born in Ireland).

With the goal of doing a comparative analysis, I went through the same process for the 1915 census. I chose the 1915 census simply because the entries were exceptionally clearly-written and because I assumed that sixty years, or more than two generations, would be enough time to reflect (or not) changes in Irish women's lives. Once again, I collected data for the first one hundred Irish women appearing in the census

whose entries were complete and legible, again paying particular attention to the categories listed above.

Once I had collected data for 1855 and 1915, I generated profiles of the average Irish woman in both samples. Then, I divided both samples into smaller sub-sets for analysis: 1) housewives; 2) working women; 3) domestic servants (the largest group among working women); and two groups that have received little attention historically: 4) widows, and 5) girls.<sup>1</sup>

### **Problems Using Censuses**

Because much of my investigation relies on information taken from censuses, it makes sense to address the issue of census data reliability.

First, it's important to be aware of the possibility of human error. Take, for instance, the entry I found for the Delaney household in the 1915 census. Eugenia Delaney's occupation is listed as "Assistant Superintendent of Public Works," while her husband's occupation is listed as "housework." In all likelihood, this is an error.

Not only do censuses contain misinformation, they're also sometimes simply difficult to read, either because the enumerator's writing is impossible to decipher or because photocopies of censuses are of poor quality. This, in turn, can lead to errors of transcription on the part of the researcher.

It's also important to remember that enumerators undercounted many minority groups, including African-Americans, the poor, itinerant workers, and immigrants. This, in turn, could affect calculations made concerning sizes of various populations.

I also discovered that what's *not* included in a census entry is often just as important as what is. For example, just because so many women in nineteenth-century censuses have "housework" listed under the heading of "occupation" doesn't mean they didn't work for pay too: Some took in sewing or washing, and others attended to the needs of boarders. In the latter case, husbands were often credited with the occupation "boarding-house keeper" because they, rather than their wives, were considered heads-of-households.

Despite these potential problems, censuses can nonetheless prove to be useful sources, even with samples as small as those I've analyzed here. Ultimately, what's important is that researchers recognize these potential problems from the outset so that findings can be adjusted or interpreted accordingly.

### **A Note on Sources**

In addition to censuses, I also utilized a few other local history resources while completing research for this study. I spent hours poring over microfilm at the Oswego Public Library, but researchers now have the advantage of viewing newspaper articles at home by accessing the Northern New York Historical Newspaper Index on the Northern New York Library System's website at <http://news.nnyln.net/>.<sup>2</sup> And Oswego City Directories, the precursor to our modern-day telephone book/yellow pages, proved useful in terms of learning about Irish women's occupations after the turn of the century. These directories are archived at the Oswego County Records Center and at SUNY Oswego's Penfield Library in Special Collections.

Anyone interested in Oswego's history will find a priceless resource in the oral history audiotapes recorded for the Oswego County Oral History Program in the 1970s, which are archived at SUNY Oswego's Penfield Library in Special Collections. A handful of these tapes deal with the Irish in Oswego—albeit almost exclusively in the context of their roles as church-builders and school-founders. These include “An Interview with Kathleen Pendergast,” “An Interview with Francis T. Riley,” and “A Panel Discussion with Luciano Iorizzo, Francis T. Riley, and Anthony Slosek.” Even more useful for me, however, were the three audiotapes of American-born, Irish-descended Carrie Dietz, one hundred years old at the time of her interviews.

Aside from local history resources, I consulted a number of published studies during my initial phase of research, though none of them mentions Oswego or Central New York specifically. Hasia A. Diner's *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1987) has been invaluable; it is still the most comprehensive work on Irish women immigrants available. Other particularly useful studies included Carol Groneman's “‘She Earns as a Child; She Pays as a Man’: Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City Community” (1977); Carole Turbin's “Reconceptualizing Family, Work, and Labor Organizing: Working Women in Troy, 1860-1890” (1984); Greg A. Hoover's “Supplemental Family Income Sources: Ethnic Differences in Nineteenth-Century Industrial America” (1985); Timothy J. Meagher's “Sweet Good Mothers and Young Women Out in the World: The Roles of Irish American Women in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Worcester, Massachusetts” (1986); and Janet Nolan's *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (1989).

Some excellent new studies of Irish women immigrants in America have been published since I completed the original draft of this study in 2000, including Janet Nolan's *Servants of the Poor: Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America* (2004); Polly Beckham's "A Little Cache of Green: The Savings Habits of Irish Immigrant Women in 1850 Philadelphia" (2002); Ruth-Ann M. Harris' "'Come You All Courageously': Irish Women in America Write Home" (2002); Diane M. Hotten-Somers' "Relinquishing and Reclaiming Independence: Irish Domestic Servants, American Middle-Class Mistresses, and Assimilation, 1850-1920" (2001); and Patricia Kelleher's "Maternal Strategies: Irish Women's Headship of Families in Gilded Age Chicago" (2001).<sup>3</sup>

Little has been written about Oswego's Irish immigrants. In fact, the only published study is Luciano Iorizzo's "The Immigrant in Oswego's History" (1966), which doesn't devote any attention to Irish women as a group. There is also an unpublished M.A. thesis, Patricia Ruppert's "Oswego's Working Women: 1915 and 1925" (1979), that touches briefly on Irish women as wage earners, though only four Irish women are included in the census samples Ruppert analyzes. Another work, Charlie Davis' *And So the Irish Built a Church* (1975), is an interesting experiment in the fusion of history and poetry, but it's difficult to discern what's real and fictional, and nearly impossible to trace the sources of Davis' information.

In the end, it was the utter paucity of research on Irish women in Oswego—or for that matter in Central New York, New York State (outside of New York City), and even the nation—that convinced me of the value of undertaking this study. Moreover, as anyone who studies Irish women immigrants is bound to discover, Irish women

demonstrated such strength and determination in their drive to succeed in America that their stories deserve to be told. And this project represents only the beginning of what can be done to learn about their lives at the local level.

## Introduction

And the famine came stalking with gaunt bony finger  
 And our landlord was ruthless and pitiless sure;  
 And sweet Kathleen, our blue-eyed—but why should we linger,  
 Recounting our sorrows—who cares for the poor?  
 Yet God careth for us. Then no more repining.  
 Though we fly from this desolate country away  
 To the free happy West; as each day is declining  
 For the land of our fathers we'll fervently pray.

-- “The Emigrant’s Farewell” (1852)

In 1855, sisters Mary and Margaret Kelly were living in Oswego, far from the home they had left behind in Ireland. They were young, twenty-two and eighteen; had only been living in the city for a few months; but had managed to find work as domestic servants in the home of Richard White, an English clerk who owned a boarding house.<sup>4</sup>

Imagine Mary and Margaret at night in their garret room after a long twelve to fifteen hours of being on their feet.<sup>5</sup> If they weren’t too tired and could spare the candles, they may have passed the time before sleep writing letters to family in Ireland. Or to keep their spirits up, especially if they had had a particularly difficult day, they may have passed the time before sleep talking about their plans for the future. Perhaps they dreamed of marrying Irish men who were already well established in America; or perhaps they dreamed of making enough money to raise dowries for themselves and then returning to Ireland—as some Irish women did—“rich” and desirable marriage partners.

If Mary and Margaret were anything like the typical Irish woman immigrant in America, they probably made the trip alone, without the company and guidance of parents or other relatives. They may have had contacts in Oswego—friends, relatives, former inhabitants of their own villages—who secured their jobs and helped them make the transition to life in America; but then again, they may not have.<sup>6</sup> It's quite possible that, at least for their first few months in America, Mary and Margaret found themselves essentially alone in a world that must have at times seemed strange and even hostile. But it was a world in which they and many other young Irish women like them would prosper, a world that offered them more choices than they would have known in the life they left behind.

Between 1855 and 1901, nearly three million Irish emigrated to America, and the majority of these immigrants, 52.9 percent, were women (Diner 31). Ireland held no future for these people, dispossessed of their land, heavily taxed, and utterly dependent on a crop that had failed more than once in the span of a few decades. As a consequence of famine, young Irish men lacked the money necessary to build homes and start families, and were forced to postpone marriage. This, in turn, led young Irish women to look beyond the limits of their villages for marriage prospects and financial security. Many of them took positions as domestic servants in cities close to home, in particular Dublin and London; others, like the Kelly sisters, came to America.

And like the Kelly sisters, the majority of these women were young and single. In fact, from 1852 to 1921 the median age for Irish women immigrants was 21.2 (Diner 31). They flooded East Coast cities and mill towns, places where they knew they could find domestic or factory work, seldom traveling beyond the ports where they landed because

they had no money to go further. Oswego was one such place. By the mid-nineteenth century, Oswego was a cosmopolitan city with booming shipping and manufacturing industries, and already had a sizeable Irish population of 2,820—nearly 25 percent of the city’s total population (Iorizzo 45). To Irish immigrants, more than half of whom were women, Oswego would have seemed a good place to begin new lives.

But what were their new lives like? That’s the question I set out to begin to answer in the pages that follow.

## Irish Women at Home

It’s sweeping at six and it’s dusting at seven;  
 It’s dinner at eight and it’s dishes at nine.  
 It’s potting and panning from ten to eleven,  
 We scarce break our fast ‘till we plan how to dine.

-- from “The Housewife’s Lament”

This excerpt from “The Housewife’s Lament” reflects the truth about the lives of nineteenth-century housewives, Irish or not: They were constantly busy. Although enumerators in 1855 didn’t consider housekeeping an occupation, the reality is that housekeeping was indeed a demanding full-time job. But Irish women, in particular, must have had an especially difficult time coping with the demands of housekeeping. Because so many of them were married to sailors and railroad builders who were absent from home for long periods of time, the tasks of keeping house; raising children; managing family finances; and possibly taking in boarders, sewing, washing, or holding down some other job all fell on their shoulders.

### **Irish Women in Oswego, 1855 and 1915**

The average woman in the 1855 sample was approximately thirty years old and had been in the U.S. for about six years. She was married to an Irish man, had 2.5 children, and wasn't working outside the home (or at least wasn't doing work enumerators recognized). The average woman in the 1915 sample was approximately fifty-seven years old and had been in the U.S. for about forty-one years. She wasn't married, had 2.5 children, and wasn't working outside the home. (See Table 1 below.)

**TABLE 1**  
**Irish Women in Oswego, 1855 and 1915\***

	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Average Years in America</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Average Number Children</b>	<b>Working</b>
<b>1855</b>	30	6	62%	56%	2.5	24%
<b>1915</b>	57	41	38%	63%	2.5	22%

**\*Statistics for all tables calculated from data taken from photocopies of New York State Census manuscripts for the City of Oswego**

The most significant change here is the decrease in the number of married Irish women, with the average number of children living with them remaining the same. This points to the increasing number of Irish widows in Oswego, women who had outlived husbands who had worked at physically-demanding and dangerous jobs—on the railroads, on the docks, in factories—their whole lives. We'll look at the lives of these

widows in more detail later, but first we'll examine more closely Oswego's Irish women in their roles as wives and mothers.

### **Married Irish Women**

As Table 1 above illustrates, Irish women in Oswego in 1855 were probably more likely to be married than in 1915. There are a few possible explanations for this. For one thing, the population of Irish women in Oswego as a whole was much older in 1915 than in 1855, and many women had outlived their husbands. Moreover, in 1855 there probably would have been a greater urgency for Irish women to marry. They had been in the country for only a few years at most, and were looking for familiarity, stability, and solidarity. They could achieve this by marrying, and more specifically by marrying Irish men. (See Table 2 below.)

**TABLE 2**  
**Married Women**

	<b>Married to Irish Men</b>	<b>Husbands' Ethnicities if Other than Irish</b>
<b>1855</b>	94%	1 Scottish 1 Swedish 1 American 1 English
<b>1915</b>	50%	15 American 2 Canadian 2 English

Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the married women in the 1855 sample, 94 percent, chose Irish partners. This is consistent with other researchers' findings. Meagher, for example, found that in Worcester both first *and* second-generation Irish women married Irish men (335). This "almost universal distaste among the Irish for intermarriage with other groups was justified on both religious and cultural grounds" (Nolan 75).

Religious differences could certainly pose problems in a relationship. An article from the June 2, 1871 issue of the *Oswego Daily Palladium* illustrates this quite clearly:

Wm. Long and Sarah Gorey live in Fulton, and are in some trouble about their matrimonial alliance. They loved and wanted to marry. William was Protestant, Sarah was Catholic and wished to be married in the forms of her faith. William complained of the trouble and expense, and the union was suspended. He then came to Oswego and soon became interested in a "widow:" hearing of which Sarah hastened to divert William from his new association by agreeing to a Protestant marriage. The moment the knot was firmly tied, Sarah "wished to remark," and did remark to William, that he had thus far had his own way; but now she would have hers. They must be married according to her faith, or they could not live together. William remonstrated, Sarah was firm, and so the matter rests, Sarah having performed a sharp flank movement on both William and the "widow."

In light of the problems that religious and cultural differences could pose, the women in the 1855 sample who chose *not* to marry Irish men present interesting case studies. As seen in Table 2, the ethnicities of their husbands are varied: American, Swedish, English, and Scottish. Three of these men were sailors; the fourth, the American, was a carpenter. The Englishman, Scotsman, and American seem likely marriage partners for Irish women because of similarities in language or culture; the Swedish/Irish marriage is an unusual one, and the only example of this particular pairing I noticed in the course of my research.

In contrast to married women in 1855, only 50 percent of the married women in the 1915 sample chose Irish partners. On the one hand this is surprising because Catholic women were so strongly encouraged to marry within their faith.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the *Guide for Catholic Young Women*, first published in 1871 (and reprinted as late as 1978), includes an entire chapter on “mixed marriages,” from which the following excerpt is taken:

A difference of religion between husband and wife is no doubt a great source of unhappiness in the marriage state, and a great evil . . . . But it may happen that a Catholic young woman may not have an opportunity to marry in her own religion . . . . She receives an offer from a Protestant of good character and disposition, who is agreeable in all respects except his religion; should she reject the offer? . . . . This depends on circumstances. In the first place, he is bound by the law of the church to solemnly promise you the free exercise of your religion, and that all children of the marriage shall be brought up Catholics. If he refuses to make these arrangements, you are bound to let him go. (284-285)

On the other hand, there are also some good reasons why Irish women would marry non-Irish marriage partners. For one thing, the pool of Irish men from which they could choose was much smaller in 1915 than it had been in 1855. Fewer men were emigrating, and many of those who had already emigrated were dead. There is also the possibility that this trend towards marrying non-Irish husbands reflects a conscious desire on the part of Irish women to be assimilated into American culture. By the time the average woman in the 1915 sample was of an age to marry, Oswego had become a much more comfortable place for the Irish to live. Catholic churches had been built, Irish cultural associations had sprung up, and the Oswego community would have been more accepting of the Irish as a consequence of its long association with them. In essence, by 1915 there would have been less pressure on Irish women to marry Irish men.

Specifically, 39 percent of the Irish women in the 1915 sample married American men, and the remaining women married Englishmen and Canadians. Perhaps they chose

American men out of necessity because Irish men were harder and harder to come by. Or perhaps they recognized that American men, Englishmen, and Canadian men had the potential to be better providers because they faced less job discrimination and had a stronger foothold in the American economic system. Regardless of the reason, by the turn of the century, Irish women in Oswego were choosing to marry American men more and more.

### **Irish Mothers**

Among the women in the 1855 sample, 56 percent had children, and the average number of children in each household was 2.5. The largest families in the sample included six children (appearing three times). The average age women began having children was twenty-four. Modes for age of women at birth of first child were twenty and twenty-one. The youngest age at which a woman gave birth was eighteen; the oldest was thirty-seven.

In the 1915 sample, more women, 63 percent, had children living with them, though the average number of children, 2.5, remained the same. One woman, Kathleen Kunan, did have nine children whose ages ranged from one to fifteen. But she seems to be the exception to the rule in Oswego; unlike most of her Irish peers, Catherine was continuously pregnant throughout her twenties and thirties. Contrary to the stereotype of the Irish-Catholic mother with her huge brood of children, Irish women in Oswego (at least in the samples I analyzed) were not as a rule having large families.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly 50 percent of the mothers in the 1915 sample were widows who still had grown children living with them. This may indicate that the members of the new

generation of Irish in Oswego were delaying marriage and childbirth in order to attend school and establish their careers.

What we see by 1915, then, seems to be little change in terms of numbers of women with children or average family size. Irish women in Oswego were still probably having moderately-sized families, and some were still choosing not to marry or have children at all. Even with the economic success that came with integration, there was no real trend toward having larger families. In fact, it may be that Irish women saw themselves as having to make a choice between marriage/children and employment if they intended to succeed in America. Because so many Irish women emigrated when they were young and single, they, unlike women from other immigrant groups, were in a unique position to strike out on their own and stay employed as long as they liked. Indeed, this is probably one of the keys to their success in America.

### Irish Women at Work

Come all ye weary factory girls  
I want you to understand  
I'm gonna leave this factory  
And return to my native land.

No more I'll take my shaker and shawl  
And hurry to the mill.  
No more I'll work so pesky hard  
To earn a dollar bill!

-- from "The Factory Girl's Come-All-Ye"<sup>9</sup>

Irish working women achieved great economic success in America. Most early immigrants, like the speaker in "The Factory Girl's Come All Ye," worked blue-collar

jobs, but Diner contends that by the end of the century they had moved into “white-collar, semi-professional” occupations “with greater ease than young [Irish] men showed” (71). For tangible evidence of their success we need look no further than records of the huge sums of money they sent home to Ireland: According to Janet Nolan, “By the 1890s they had sent over \$5 million per year to families in Connaught and Munster alone” (*Ourselves Alone* 70).

Irish women in Oswego played an important role in the economic success of their families. Wives and daughters worked outside the home, in factories, in the sewing trades, and as domestic servants; and they worked inside the home by taking in sewing, washing, and boarders. Although it’s difficult to tell by looking at isolated census entries, the average Irish working woman in Oswego probably held a variety of jobs throughout her lifetime. This is certainly true of American-born, Irish-descended Carrie Dietz, one hundred years old at the time of her interviews for the Oswego County Oral History Project in the 1970s. In her three audiotaped interviews, Carrie mentions taking in washing; working at the Diamond Match Factory; and working as a domestic, a cook, a nurse, and a waitress.

For those Irish women who had come to America single, finding work was an absolute necessity for survival. Often these women took jobs as domestics because there was such a high demand for them—especially since American women and women from other ethnic groups attached a stigma to domestic service.<sup>10</sup> Such positions were also attractive to Irish women because room and board were included, which cut down on their cost-of-living expenses, and in turn helped them earn extra money to send to family in Ireland or save for a dowry.<sup>11</sup>

### Irish Working Women, 1855 and 1915

In the 1855 sample, 24 percent of the women worked. The average working woman was twenty-five years old (the oldest was seventy-four), wasn't married, and had no children. By 1915, these demographics had changed, but only slightly: 22 percent of the women worked, their average age was forty-two, and the majority weren't married and had no children. (See Table 3 below.) As a rule, married Irish women in Oswego didn't work outside the home. This was also true of wives in Ireland. In fact, there was such strong national sentiment expressed against this that "by 1923 the new Irish Free State constitutionally prohibited wives from working outside the home" (Meagher 326).

**TABLE 3**  
**Working Women**

	Average Age	Married	Children	Occupations
<b>1855</b>	25	8%	8%	19 servants 2 tayloresses 1 milliner 1 seamstress 1 boarding house
<b>1915</b>	42	18%	22%	17 servants 1 grocer 1 teacher 1 dressmaker 1 knitting mill 1 merchant

It should be noted that a number of women in the 1855 sample did work that *wasn't* recognized by enumerators. For example, fourteen women had boarders living in their households, yet enumerators didn't credit them with the occupation of "boarding-house keeper" because their husbands (most of whom probably worked other jobs and had little to do with the day-to-day workings of the boarding houses anyway) were considered heads-of-households. It's especially important to recognize the work these women did because money from boarders was such a significant source of income for the Irish family. In fact, the Irish in America used boarder income 1.6 to 2.96 times as much as U.S. families (Hoover 297), and in 1855 wives who took care of boarders took in an average of \$1.25 per week for each boarder (Groneman 89), which was not an insignificant amount at that time.

### **Occupations**

As illustrated in Table 3, among the working women in the 1855 sample are nineteen servants, two tayloresses, one milliner, one seamstress, and one boarding-house keeper.<sup>12</sup> The high percentage of servants isn't surprising since domestic service was such a popular choice for unmarried immigrants. The remaining occupations aren't surprising either; all are blue-collar jobs requiring women to make use of skills they probably would have learned in some fashion when they were living with their families in Ireland.<sup>13</sup>

What *is* surprising, especially in light of Diner's research concerning Irish women's success at obtaining white-collar positions by the early twentieth century, is how little variation there is in women's occupations in Oswego by 1915, at least in the sample I analyzed. Among the 1915 working women are seventeen servants, one grocer,

one teacher, one dressmaker, one knitting mill winder, and one merchant. There are a few white-collar occupations represented here, and so at first glance it may *seem* that by 1915 Irish women in Oswego were finally beginning to move into white-collar work. These data, however, are misleading. Two of the three women who held traditionally white-collar positions, the merchant and the grocer, were widows who probably inherited their businesses. The other woman, the teacher, represents the only significant occupational breakthrough in the 1915 sample.

### **Domestic Servants**

Domestic service was such a popular occupation for Irish women in nineteenth-century America that Sister Mary Francis' *Advice to Young Irish Girls in America* (1870), a well-known pamphlet for Irish immigrants, even included a chapter entitled "The Honor of Being Servants." Domestic service, it seems, was closely tied to the Catholic faith. The *Guide for Catholic Young Women* even goes so far as to advise young Catholic servants:

. . . Do your duty, and do it well. Do it as well as if you saw the Lord looking at you, and were doing it for Him. Do not at all consider who your employer may be, but look at Christ . . . . Suppose she [the mistress of the house] scolds you unjustly, when you have committed no fault; bear it patiently: let the storm blow over. For it is the Lord that has placed her over you, and who says. "Obey in all things"—that is to say, where there is no sin or wrong. (155)

Domestic service was also a popular occupation for Irish women in Oswego. In fact, the overwhelming majority of working women in both the 1855 and 1915 samples were domestic servants. As such, the occupation merits special consideration here.

In the 1855 sample, the average age of domestic servants was eighteen; the oldest servant was thirty. Clearly, domestic service was an occupation of the young—in part

because most early Irish women immigrants were in fact young. None of the domestic servants in the sample was married or had children. Only 21 percent lived in Irish households. (This, I believe, is a particularly important distinction to make when we look at the lives of Irish immigrants in 1855, especially domestic servants, many of whom came to America alone and single, and then had to make a place for themselves in households that weren't generally Irish or Catholic.)

These demographics had changed by 1915. In the 1915 sample, the average age of domestic servants was forty. The youngest servant was twenty; the oldest was seventy-four; and their mode age was thirty. This suggests that by 1915 domestic service was no longer an occupation earmarked for young women (who were by now moving on to other blue-collar and some white-collar positions) or for single women. Of the domestic servants in the sample, 24 percent were married and 18 percent had children. Only 12 percent lived in Irish households—most likely because there were fewer Irish households existing in the city by this time. (See Table 4 below.)

**TABLE 4**  
**Domestic Servants**

	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Living in Irish Households</b>
<b>1855</b>	18	0%	0%	21%
<b>1915</b>	40	24%	18%	12%

What exactly did domestic service entail? Domestic servants were asked to perform a variety of tasks depending on the size of the families that employed them, the

occupations of their employers, and the types of residences in which they lived.

Advertisements from Oswego newspapers indicate more specifically what was required of them. For example, an ad from the July 22, 1840 issue of the *Oswego Palladium* reads:

WANTED. In a private family, a WOMAN who understands Cooking, washing, and Ironing. One who understands her business perfectly, and can come well-recommended will be required. None other need apply

And a similar ad from the August 5, 1856 *Oswego Daily Palladium* reads:

GIRL WANTED—One who fully understands Cooking, washing, &c. Also one who knows to take care of children properly and do chamber work, &c., may apply with good references to 46 West Third Street.

From our modern perspective, domestic service may not seem like a particularly attractive occupation, but it did have its advantages. For example, women who would not otherwise have been able to afford adequate housing and food had these things provided for them as domestics. In this sense, some domestic servants probably had a better quality of life than factory workers who often earned higher wages. This is not to say, however, that domestic servants encountered few problems. For one thing, they worked nearly every day, all day. For example, Carrie Dietz, discussing her work as a domestic servant with Dr. Judith Wellman, describes washing days when she worked from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. And since most domestic servants lived with their employers, their work was never really done: they were only a ring of the bell or a shout away.<sup>14</sup>

Irish domestics also faced dealing with the prejudices of their mostly non-Irish, non-Catholic employers.<sup>15</sup> These attitudes could be openly hostile, especially when voiced in the form of anti-Catholic propaganda. Tracts such as *The Female Jesuit* and

*The Spy in the Family* even circulated the idea that “Catholic domestics had been dispatched to spy for the Pope” (Dudden 69).

Of course, the Irish also harbored their share of prejudiced notions about their employers. Ann McNabb, an Irish cook who emigrated to Philadelphia during the height of the famine, had this to say about one of her first jobs:

After two months I got a place. They were nice appearing people enough, but the second day I found out they were Jews. I never had seen a Jew before, so I packed my bag and said to the lady, “I beg your pardon, ma’am, but I can’t eat the bread of them as crucified the Saviour.” “But,” she said, “he was a Jew.” So at that point I put out. I couldn’t hear such talk. (Holt 146)

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of working in an American household would have been the domestic servant’s isolation from other Irish. Then again, this may have also been the very thing that allowed Irish women to integrate so successfully into American culture. Separated from family, friends, and any sense of Irish community, young Irish women had no choice but to adapt—and quickly—to American ways.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes a family or business employed more than one Irish servant or even multiple family members (as was the case with the Kelly sisters, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this study), and so these young Irish women could take comfort in each other’s presence. But this wasn’t always the case. Diaries and letters written by young Irish domestics in Oswego could help us more fully understand the effect of this isolation on Irish women’s ability to integrate into American culture.

### Irish Widows

For she’d lick him, she’d kick him,  
She’d never let him be.  
She’d slash him, she’d lash him,

Until he couldn't see.  
 Oh, McCarthy wasn't hearty,  
 Now she has a different party,  
 She might have licked McCarthy,  
 But she can't lick me.

-- from "McCarthy's Widow"<sup>17</sup>

The chorus from "McCarthy's Widow" reflects one of the popular notions about Irish widows: that they were feisty forces to be reckoned with. Certainly, the experience of facing the early death of a husband and the prospect of bringing up children alone could turn any woman into a tough-minded fighter who had to work hard to watch out for her family's best interests. This is especially true of the Irish in America, where, given the high mortality rate for Irish men, most Irish women probably expected to be widows by the time they reached their fifties.<sup>18</sup> So many Irish men died while building the railroads that "it was said that there was 'an Irishman buried under every tie'" (Wakin 50). Stereotypes aside, the truth about widowhood is that although it sometimes brought Irish women increased independence and power, it could also bring economic hardship.

### **Widows, 1855 and 1915**

Among the women of the 1855 sample, 12 percent were widows. Their average age was forty-one; the youngest was twenty-seven; and the oldest was sixty. The overwhelming majority of these widows, 83 percent, had children living with them. Only two widows had occupations listed: one was a domestic servant and the other was a boarding-house keeper.

By 1915, these demographics had changed dramatically. Among the women of the 1915 sample, 33 percent were widows. Their average age was sixty-seven; the

youngest was forty-two; and the oldest was eighty-two. Again, the overwhelming majority of widows, 97 percent, had children living with them—though they were mostly adult children. Only two widows worked: one as merchant and the other as a grocer. (See Table 5 below.)

**TABLE 5**  
**Widows**

	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Children in Household</b>	<b>Working</b>	<b>Occupations</b>
<b>1855</b>	41	83%	16%	1 servant 1 boarding house
<b>1915</b>	67	97%	6%	1 merchant 1 grocer

The increased number of widows and their higher average age in 1915 can be attributed to the death of the generation of the first large waves of immigrants who came to America in the 1840s and 1850s, and the decrease in Irish immigrants in Oswego after 1870. What is perhaps most interesting about the changes in these demographics, however, is the number of widows in 1915 who had grown children living with them, which points to a trend in delayed marriage for the widows' children's generation.

### **Sources of Widows' Income**

One of the most interesting questions regarding widows is, how did they support themselves and their dependent children? Among the 1855 widows, only two worked,

which leaves ten widows with no apparent means of support. Of these remaining ten widows, three lived in households that included as members young working male relatives—all laborers. These young men most likely contributed to the support of widows and other family members.

But this still leaves seven of the 1855 widows who had no apparent financial support. Of these seven widows, two were boarders, and so would have had minimal living expenses anyway. This leaves five widows. How they supported themselves and their families (all five had young children) is a mystery. Maybe they had relatives who contributed money, maybe they had inherited money, or maybe they had sold possessions or homes after the deaths of their husbands. One household, that of Ann Daly, is especially conspicuous because it was full of women and girls who had no occupations listed, and thus no apparent means of support: fifty-six-year old Ann, her thirty-year old daughter Mary, and Mary's three young daughters.

The answer to the question of how widows coped financially is much more clear-cut when we look at the 1915 sample. *All* of the widows had adult children and/or other relatives living with them, and the majority of these relatives held jobs. These children and members of extended families supported widows, most likely delaying marriage to do so.

Thus although Oswego's population of Irish widows in 1915 was larger, proportionately, than it had been in 1855, it's likely that widows in 1915 had a better quality of life than their predecessors because they had grown children to care for them instead of they themselves having to care for young children. These grown children

could afford to support their mothers because they were doing better financially than their parents had due to increased opportunities for education and white-collar work.

### Irish Girls

She works hard down town each day,  
The work is large, but small the pay  
At home she helps to pay the way,  
Does my Dora Dooley.  
She had younger brothers three,  
Her father's just "gone blind" while he  
Was looking for prosperity,  
So says my Dora Dooley.

-- from "Dora Dooley" (1899)

During the mid to late-nineteenth century, it was common for Irish girls in America, some even as young as eleven, to work outside the home. Most worked as domestic servants. But many, like "Dora Dooley," worked in factories or shops. There are a number of reasons why these young girls might be required to support themselves or help support their families: some of them had emigrated alone, some lived in one-parent households, and others had parents who had trouble finding work. By 1915, however, fewer Irish girls in Oswego were working, mainly because they were attending school.

#### **Irish Girls, 1855 and 1915**

Since so many famine-era immigrants were young women, the Irish population in Oswego in 1855 naturally included a large number of girls born in Ireland. But by 1915 there were so few girls born in Ireland living in Oswego that I had to enlarge the sample to include girls born in America to one or more Irish parents. Even then, I could only

find fifty complete and legible entries. Thus although the 1915 sample is smaller than the 1855 sample, it accounts for nearly every Irish girl between the ages of twelve and seventeen living in Oswego at the time.

### **Married Girls**

Only two of the girls in the 1855 sample were married. Both were seventeen years old. One of these girls had a four-year-old child (though the child could have been her husband's from a previous marriage), which meant that she might have given birth at the unusually young age of thirteen.

None of the girls in the 1915 sample was married. By 1915, there was less pressure on Irish girls to marry. For the most part, they lived with and were supported by their parents, and thus were afforded the opportunity of finishing school and beginning careers before marriage.

### **Irish Girls at Work**

Of the girls in the 1855 sample, 52 percent worked. An overwhelming majority of these girls, 96 percent, worked as domestic servants. The two remaining girls worked as a milliner and a dressmaker. Clearly, domestic service was *the* occupation for Irish girls in 1855.

On a related note, some of the domestics listed in the 1855 census were even younger than twelve—too young, in fact, to be included in my sample. Where were their parents? It must have been an incredibly difficult experience for these young girls to have been living in a foreign country with strangers (even if their parents were nearby) and at the same time to have been coping with the demands of domestic work. These

very young Irish domestics present fascinating subjects for study, and their lives have yet to be explored fully by historians.

None of the Irish working girls in the 1855 sample lived with their parents, though 6 percent did live in Irish households. But 40 percent of these working girls lived and worked in households that also employed other Irish servants, which must have made the transition to living and working in a strange household easier.

By 1915 only 26 percent of the girls worked: six were match factory hands, three were mill-hands, two were salesladies, one was a starch factory worker, and one was a domestic servant. The majority of girls working in 1915, then, still held blue-collar positions—mainly because they were too young to have the education or experience to acquire white-collar ones. Of the remainder of the girls in the sample, 72 percent attended school and 2 percent did housework.<sup>19</sup> (See Table 6 below.)

**TABLE 6**  
**Irish Girls**

	<b>Married</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Working</b>	<b>Occupations</b>	<b>Living in Irish Households</b>
<b>1855</b>	2%	1%	52%	50 servants 1 milliner 1 dressmaker	6%
<b>1915</b>	0%	0%	26%	6 match factory 3 mill-hands 2 salesladies 1 starch factory 1 servant	98%

Working in the Diamond Match Factory appears to have been a family enterprise.<sup>20</sup> Among the six girls in the 1915 sample who worked there were two sets of sisters. The Ellis sisters, ages fifteen and seventeen, worked there, as did another of their sisters too old to be included in the sample. The Morgan sisters, ages sixteen and seventeen, the only girls in the 1915 sample to have been born in Ireland, also worked there, along with their father.

Work in the match factory must have been grueling. In her audiotaped interview with Dr. Judith Wellman, Carrie Dietz had this to say about her ten-hour days there at the age of fifteen:

They'd [the matches] come out through a slide and you'd have to grab a handful and put them in boxes. Your fingers would get sore. Outside of the boxes is rough sand and you grab a handful of matches and then grab the box, with the sand. Takes the skin off your fingers. I kept up two machines. Nine dollars a week. For a whole six days.

Carrie also talks about another on-the-job hazard: "The snow in the matches isn't healthy, the sulfur. You'd get awful sick. When you go to pee it's yellow. You breathe so much of the sulfur."

There seems to have been no particular parental pattern that indicated likelihood of girls to be working. Of the thirteen working girls of Irish descent in 1915, three lived in households with an Irish father/American mother, four lived in households with an American father/Irish mother, four lived in households where both parents were Irish, and two lived in households headed by Irish widows. The one thing these girls did have in common is that they all had mothers who *did not* work outside the home, so perhaps this also had something to do with whether they would have been expected to work.

What we see by 1915, then, is a trend toward fewer girls of Irish descent working and more of them attending school. In fact, in 1900 “school attendance among girls with Irish-born fathers surpassed not only that of their brothers, but also that of the daughters of either American-born or foreign-born fathers” (Nolan *Ourselves Alone* 81). Of course, some Irish girls still worked, and when they did, they worked blue-collar jobs. But the Irish working girl was becoming a thing of the past. Sassler notes that “part of the process of Americanization was ‘learning’ to keep daughters in the home, where they could master the roles expected of them as wives and mothers” (186). Perhaps Irish mothers in Oswego were “learning” to keep their daughters at home too.

By 1915, Irish girls were no longer automatically being associated with domestic service; through the interaction of a combination of economic and social factors, Irish girls were finally able to overcome the stereotype of the “Bridget,” the clumsy, unworldly servant girl. Although the early wave of young Irish immigrant girls had worked long, hard hours at menial work, their experience working was one of the things that allowed them to rise above the station they had occupied in Ireland. In rural Ireland, girls seldom had the chance to work outside the home and make money of their own—or to experience the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with working. But in America “the daughter in the Irish family no longer occupied the lowest rung of importance and respect” (Diner 46).

## Conclusion

She says she’s a regular daisy,  
Uses slang till my poor heart is sore,

She now warbles snatches from operas,  
 When she used to sing “Peggy O’ Moore.”  
 Sure she’s gone to the devil entirely,  
 She’s bleach’d her hair till it is lighter,  
 And I’ll dance on the face of the man,  
 That taught her to play the Typewriter.

-- from “Bridget McGuire” (1889)<sup>21</sup>

As this verse from “Bridget McGuire” demonstrates, the road to assimilation in America could involve any number of choices on the part of Irish women. Some elected to finish high school or continue their educations after high school so they could acquire white-collar jobs—the kinds of jobs that would have been unavailable to their mothers. Others chose to modify their appearance in order to seem more American, perhaps having in mind the image—one with almost mythic resonations—of the vivacious blonde party girl that even then personified American culture to immigrants. And of course many young Irish and Irish-American women sought out American men as dates and marriage partners.

But to what degree were Irish women in Oswego *actually* assimilated and how quickly? This is a difficult question to answer. It’s possible, however, that they had an easier time of it than their male counterparts did. Being an Irish man in America was a potentially-dangerous thing. Not only were Irish men victims of vicious stereotypical characterization, depicted as drunken, fighting monsters,<sup>22</sup> they were seen as real threats because of their involvement in politics—even in Central New York. Take, for example, this ominous item from the August 5, 1856 issue of the *Oswego Daily Palladium*: “It is not denied that the ‘radical’ Black Republicans at Syracuse choked off an Irishman who

proposed to offer an Anti-Know Nothing resolution. Irishmen, remember that.” A month later, a Catholic church was set on fire in Syracuse under mysterious circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, anti-Catholic sentiment was being expressed all over the country. In its extreme form, this anti-Catholicism ran toward hate. This is clear in an article from the September 2, 1855 issue of the *Oswego Daily Palladium* about the Templars, a secret order of the Know-Nothings. Members of the Templars were to “abjure Catholicism—not to marry Catholics, nor hold any social intercourse, nor to trade with them, or in any way recognize them as fellow citizens.”

On the other hand, there was also great support for the Irish cause in Oswego. For example, the February 23, 1847 issue of the *Oswego Palladium* includes an article about a rally held at the Market Hall to raise money for Irish relief:

Previous to the close of the meeting a subscription was opened, to which was subscribed *immediately*, money and provisions to the amount of upwards of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS! Such an experiment of liberality has not been exhibited in any city in the Union. In proportion to the population and means of Oswego, her subscription is larger than has been made anywhere.

Most of these subscribers were Irish, but there are also a number of surnames on lists of subscribers and committee members *not* traditionally associated with the Irish.

Irish women in Oswego involved themselves less in politics and public matters than Irish men, and so were less visible.<sup>24</sup> This makes it difficult to determine the community’s opinion of them—especially in the nineteenth century. They are, like most women in our country’s history, almost invisible, and only the researcher who deliberately looks for evidence of their lives may find it.

It is clear, however, that by the turn of the century Irish women were beginning to become more visible as members of community service organizations and social clubs—

though more often than not these organizations and clubs were Catholic or Irish-affiliated. For example, Irish women in Oswego had a long history of being involved in relief efforts for Ireland; as far back as 1841 their names were on lists of contributing members of the “Friends of Ireland” group. A review of local newspaper articles also attests to Irish women’s involvement in Catholic fairs, church festivals, fundraisers, and the Women’s Temperance League. But according to the 1916 Oswego City Directory, the president of the Woman’s Club in Oswego was a Miss Adeline Hinckley, and the president of the Home for the Homeless was a Miss Annie Lyons, so Irish women’s community service was apparently not limited to Irish/Catholic spheres.

A look at the 1916 Oswego City Directory also attests to the fact that Irish women were beginning to take on more prestigious and better-paying jobs, many of which required specialized training or degrees. For example, among the principals of local schools were an Ella A. Dempsey, a Mary Slattery, a Helen O’Brien, and a Minnie E. Doran. And of course a good percentage of the teachers in these schools—far too many to mention here individually—were women of Irish descent. Although Irish women apparently held no governmental positions of power in Oswego in 1916, they did work as secretaries for local governmental organizations like the County Clerk’s Office (Minnie Roark), the city’s financial department (Miss Emma A. Bradley), and the post office (Miss Catherine A McMahan). Numerous Irish nurses were employed in Oswego; these include a Julia E. Casey, a Marie Doran, a Mary A. Finn, an Adelaide Hourigan, a Helen G. Kelly, and an Elizabeth V. Murphy. Oswego even boasted an Irish physician/surgeon, Eva McKnight; a real-estate agent, Julia A. Fitzgerald; as well as many Irish women

storekeepers and grocers, including a Margaret Horan, a Sarah Moran, and a Catharine McNulty.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, there were also Irish women on the fringes of Oswego society: criminals, prostitutes, and the homeless. There were women who had abandoned families in Ireland to come to America, and women who abandoned families in America to return to Ireland. The lives of such women are even more difficult to research, but present no-less fascinating subjects for future studies, if primary source documents concerning them can be uncovered.

But *this* study has, I hope, demonstrated some of the ways in which the lives of Irish women in Oswego may have changed from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In 1855, most Irish women in Oswego worked long, grueling hours at home or as domestic servants in homes that weren't their own, in a country that wasn't theirs. But by the turn of the century, these women and their daughters and granddaughters had become, among other things, the teachers of Oswego's children, the caretakers of Oswego's sick, and the members of Oswego's community service organizations—in essence, had carved a niche for themselves in Oswego's economic and social structures.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this study, “Irish girls” means one of two things. For 1855, I’m defining “Irish girls” as females born in Ireland and between the ages of twelve and seventeen. By 1915, there were so few girls born in Ireland living in Oswego that I had to extend this sample to include girls born in America to one or more Irish parents. Even then, the 1915 sample includes only fifty girls, but accounts for nearly every Irish girl living in Oswego at the time.

<sup>2</sup>Anyone interested in viewing articles published in Oswego before 1916, however, will have still have to read them on microfilm at the Oswego Public Library or SUNY Oswego’s Penfield Library.

<sup>3</sup>A number of as-of-yet unpublished dissertations have also been written in the last few years about Irish women immigrants. These include Tara Monica McCarthy’s “True Women, Trade Unionists, and the Lessons of Tammany Hall: Ethnic Identity, Social Reform, and the Political Culture of Irish Women in America, 1880-1923” (U of Rochester, 2006); Margaret Lynch-Brennan’s “Ubiquitous Biddy: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930” (SUNY Albany, 2003); and Elizabeth Pollard Grayson’s “‘Calling the Heart Back Home’: Irish Catholic Women in America, 1845-1915” (U of Texas, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>It’s ironic that these two young women left an Ireland controlled by the English only to find that in America, too, the English held dominion over them. This phenomenon hasn’t received much attention from historians, but certainly seems one worth exploring.

<sup>5</sup>This figure of twelve to fifteen hours comes from a study prepared by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor in 1901 and cited by Hotten-Somers in “Relinquishing and Reclaiming Independence: Irish Domestic Servants, Americans Middle-Class Mistresses, and Assimilation, 1850-1920.”

<sup>6</sup>Historians have long assumed that so many young Irish women were able to migrate to America successfully because a female network or “chain mechanism” was in place to help them along the way. See O’Connell’s “‘Take Care of the Immigrant Girls’: The Migration Process of Late-Nineteenth Century Irish Women” for persuasive evidence to the contrary.

<sup>7</sup>Of course, it’s possible that some of these non-Irish husbands *were* actually Catholic.

<sup>8</sup>See Guinnane et. al., “The Fertility of the Irish in the United States in 1910” (2006), for evidence to the contrary based on an analysis of census data for the entire U.S.

<sup>9</sup>A “Come-All-Ye” is a type of Irish folk song. In some versions of “The Factory Girl’s Come-All-Ye,” the word “weary” is replaced with the name of the city where the factory was located. Wenner and Freilicher note that versions have been discovered in Massachusetts, Texas, and North Carolina. Historians believe the anonymous author was a nineteenth-century Irish immigrant woman working in a textile mill in Lowell, MA.

<sup>10</sup>See Diner, 80-84.

<sup>11</sup>See Beckham, “A Little Cache of Green: The Savings Habits of Irish Immigrant Women in 1850 Philadelphia,” for a fascinating look at Irish women’s savings accounts, most of whom were domestic servants.

<sup>12</sup>On a side note, the 1855 census includes examples of typical milliners’ wages: female milliners in Oswego made \$12 a month; male milliners made more than four times that amount--\$50 a month.

<sup>13</sup>Groneman’s findings for New York City’s Sixth Ward are similar. She notes that the most common occupation for Irish women ages fifteen to forty-nine in 1855 was domestic and personal service: hotel maids, waitresses, cooks, personal servants, housekeepers, and laundresses. The next most common occupation, also consistent with my findings, was the sewing trades (85).

<sup>14</sup>Of course, not all domestics worked for difficult or prejudiced employers. In her letters to future husband James P. Phelan, Irish immigrant Annie O’Donnell, who worked for the W.L. Mellon household in Pittsburgh, repeatedly describes her employers in glowing terms, mentioning that they took her on trips, gave her time off, and treated her like a member of the family. See *Your Fondest Annie: Letters from Annie O’ Donnell to James P. Phelan 1901-1904*.

<sup>15</sup>I never found an ad in an Oswego newspaper that specified “No Irish or Catholics need apply.” In contrast are ads like this one from the September 4, 1830 issue of the *New York Evening Post*: “Wanted—A Cook or a Chambermaid. They must be American, Scotch, Swiss, or African—no Irish” (qtd. in Wakin 52). Jensen theorizes that because so few of these ads and signs have survived that the “No Irish Need Apply” phenomenon in America is actually a myth.

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, Hotten-Somers contends that the mistress-maid relationship “defined the Irish woman’s process of assimilation into American society.”

<sup>17</sup>That songs about widows even exist suggests they played an important role in Irish and Irish-American culture. Another well-known example is “Biddy Mulligan, The Pride of the Coombe”: “You may travel from Clare to the county Kildare / From Francis Street back to the Coombe; / But where would you see a fine widow like me? / Biddy Mulligan the Pride of the Coombe, me boys / Biddy Mulligan the pride of the Coombe.”

<sup>18</sup> See Kelleher's "Maternal Strategies: Irish Women's Headship of Families in Gilded Age Chicago" for an analysis of the correlation between Irish men's mortality rates and Irish women's headship of families.

<sup>19</sup> Unlike the 1915 census, the 1855 census doesn't specify what Irish girls who weren't working were doing.

<sup>20</sup> Diner notes that mill owners "offered bonuses and other advantages to employees who brought in kin to add to the ranks of the operatives" (76). Perhaps this was also the case in Oswego's mills and factories.

<sup>21</sup> It appears that assimilation was a source of tension between Irish fathers and their daughters. "Bridget McGuire" is one song that reflects this; another is "If I Catch the Man" (1882): "If I catch the man who taught her to dance, / The la-de-da dance, the tra-la-la dance, / On top of his nose I'll make my fist prance / And the twist of both of his legs, ha ha."

<sup>22</sup> For extensive discussion of these stereotypes see Curtis' *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Oswego Daily Palladium*, 12 Sep. 1956, pg. 2.

<sup>24</sup> This was not, however, true of the Irish women of Troy, NY, who, because of their domination of the collar-making industry, were heavily involved in labor union organizing. See Turbin "Reconceptualizing Family, Work, and Labor Organizing: Working Women in Troy, 1860-1890."

<sup>25</sup> I'm assuming that the surnames listed for these women are their Irish maiden names, rather than married names, since none of them are attributed with the title "Mrs." in the City Directory. Of course, it's possible that some of them were American widows who had been married to Irish men.

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## **Folk and Popular Songs**

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