

Introduction

This paper represents one of the twenty-eight papers presented at the conference entitled "Ethnic Identity in Atlantic Canada" in April, 1981. The conference committee decided to publish only a selected number of papers arising from this conference in the hope that other efforts would be stimulated in the field of Ethnic Studies.

I would like to thank Ken MacKinnon, Kay Tudor, Cyril Byrne all of the English Department and Helen Ralston of the Sociology Department for serving on the conference committee and making the gathering a success. I would also like to thank Mary Boyd, Assistant Director of the International Education Centre for bringing the papers together in their final edited form.

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ASPECTS OF IRISH HALIFAX AT CONFEDERATION

Paper presented at the conference "Ethnic Identity in Atlantic Canada", April 1981. Co-sponsored by the Atlantic Canada Studies Programme and the International Education Centre, Saint Mary's University.

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INTRODUCTION

The oldest English colony was not Newfoundland but Ireland.

The English attitude towards the Irish was as inconsistent as it was unflattering. The Irish were considered "a type of aboriginal native, less hairy and less uncouth after the benefits of two centuries of war and English administration, but . . . at bottom for the most part savages."¹ Most Irish were Roman Catholics, and that was the religion of England's enemies, France and Spain. Papists were portrayed as Jesuit-inspired agents of these foes. An English government erected the penal laws which the statesman, Edmund Burke, vilified as a machine of subtle invention, the best adapted to the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, the debasement of human nature itself, which has ever been conceived by the perverted ingenuity of men."² By law you make a people sink to an unlettered peasantry, then you denounce them for savages.

When the Irish emigrated to North America they did not escape from the prejudices of the Anglophone majority. Such narrowness of outlook was as

¹Charles-M. Garnier, A Popular History of Ireland (Cork: The Mercer Press, 1961), 83.

²Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke to Sir Hercules Langrishe, open letter; quoted in ibid., 85-86.

characteristic of North American writers as ever it was of those in the old country. This paper will examine the anti-Irish prejudice of the British majority as it bears on Nova Scotia between the 1820's and the 1860's. Since these expressed biases will be weighed against the evidence of contemporary statistics, the paper is entitled "Some Aspects of Irish Halifax at Confederation".

THE LITERARY EVIDENCE

Several authors provide us with the image of the Irish which they offered their nineteenth-century Nova Scotian contemporaries. Some of our sources are anonymous, being the work of that prolific fellow "Author Unknown". A few others have names, but we can dismiss them with a phrase or two when they arise in the course of this paper to sling their single outrageous arrow.

However, there remain four men who must be acknowledged with rather more than a cursory nod. When we see their names we shall realize the formidable array of intellect, achievement and reputation they represent. Among their common characteristics is that they all had a part in portraying Irish people unfavourably. Moreover these influential personalities created an atmosphere which was inhospitable, and sometimes distinctly hostile, to the Irish in Nova Scotia. The four men were Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Thomas McCulloch, Abraham Gesner, and Joseph Howe. What a battery of talent we have there - the law, the church, science and politics. To read their material is to study the minds of nineteenth-century Nova Scotians.

Collectively this quartet played a leading part in forming the views of their contemporaries, at least those of them who read or attended lectures. From

the 1820's to the 1860's they must be considered the arbiters of opinion among the majority of Nova Scotians. When we acknowledge that the Irish of Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century were not exactly praised by such men we must be prepared to admit that such disparagement was influential in its time.

Some authors viewed the Irish as being ignorant, rowdy fellows. The earlier sentiment may derive from the more usual description of the Irish as heavy drinkers; again, it may not. When one Loyalist wished to destroy Richard Uniacke he turned to the language of invective. Edward Winslow referred to the future attorney-general as "a great lubberly insolent Irish rebel".³ Another Loyalist, John Wentworth, was more general when he complained of the "useless Irishmen who pass annually from Newfoundland through this province".⁴ Admittedly these views were not offered for public delectation, but they serve to illustrate a negative attitude in that both use the word "Irish" or "Irishmen" as pejorative terms. Would Uniacke have been less a rebel or less insolent in Winslow's eyes had he not been born in Ireland? Would the unemployed Newfoundlanders have found work and been "useful" had they not been Irish?

Once the province had a local magazine in the 1830's we see that the low opinion of the Irish had continued. Any literate Nova Scotian could read the story about an Irishman who shot a donkey and

³Brian C. Cuthbertson, The Old Attorney General (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 1980), 14, quoting Edward Winslow to Ward Chipman, 7 July 1783.

⁴P.A.N.S., R.G. 1, Vol. 54, 146. Wentworth to Lord Castlereagh, 3 Feb. 1806.

thought it was a large rabbit.⁵ How stupid these Irish are! Throngs of Catholics - Irish naturally - profaned the pure air of the Sabbath morn with their mirth and blasphemy while the decent people wended their sober way to church and chapel.⁶ It only went to show the truth of what Rev. Mr. Gordon was saying about Papish Irish idolatry, superstition and sin!⁷ Readers learned that the "curse of the Emerald Isle" was violence.⁸ How brutish these Micks are! Joseph Howe summed it up in 1857 when he wrote:

Yet there are certain persons, calling themselves Irishmen, in this community . . . but, to all intents and purposes, they are and will be regarded as a foreign element in the midst of a British community.⁹

The two most consistent criticisms directed against Howe's "foreign element" concerned their suitability for work and the use of liquor. Regarding the first point, we must keep in mind that we are dealing with a people who had been primarily men of the soil in Ireland, now transferred to urban situations or who confronted the problem of farming unfamiliar crops in a vastly different soil and climate than they had known in Ireland. The Nova

⁵The Halifax Monthly Magazine, Vol. I, No. 2 (1 July 1830), 57-59.

⁶Halifax: "Its Sins and Sorrows" (Halifax: Conference Job Printing Office, 1862), 8. This was written in 1854 by Rev. Gordon, City missionary.

⁷Ibid., 33. This was written in 1855.

⁸The Halifax Monthly Magazine, ibid., 67.

⁹The Novascotian, 19 Jan. 1857.

Scottian expert, Titus Smith, recognized the nature of the difficulty as early as 1801. He observed that those who were farmers were accustomed to land which "required a different mode of cultivation, so that they are often necessarily somewhat awkward at their business."¹⁰

Abraham Gesner considered that the Irish were not suitable material for settlers in Nova Scotia. Admittedly he wrote at a time when poverty-stricken refugees from the Irish potato famine were filling the east coast ports of America with disease and confusion. Yet Gesner did not object to the Irish immigrants on the grounds of the risk of infection which they carried with them to America in the late 1840's. It was the impact that the Irish newcomers would have on the labour market that agitated the famous geologist. Gesner believed that Nova Scotia had not the public works to employ or transport throngs of unskilled workers. He felt that "to pour into the country a great number of such families before certain employment is provided, would be but to increase that misery and burden the established population." He added that "there is a decided spirit of opposition on the part of the native born inhabitants to the further introduction of the poor and labour classes of Irish into the country."¹¹

If wholesale landings of poor Irish people were permitted, Gesner foresaw "unhappy consequences", but the settlement "of English, Lowland Scotch, or German emigrants would be cheered by the inhabitants of

¹⁰P.A.N.S., R.G. 1, Vol. 380, 110 (Report of Smith to Wentworth).

¹¹Abraham Gesner, The Industrial Resources of Nova Scotia (Halifax: A. & W. MacKinlay, 1849), 332-333.

Nova Scotia . . ."¹² The Irish - and, it may be added in passing, the Highland Scot - were not wanted in Nova Scotia. He was quite candid about stating his objections to these Celtic people. It was "not the absolute poverty of the emigrant that unfits him for an inhabitant of these Provinces; it is too often the lack of sobriety, industry, and a resolute spirit of enterprise" . . ."¹³ The Catholics of Ireland had not imbibed the work ethic which was so favoured by the nineteenth-century improvers who saw industrialization and capitalism as the real forms of progress in their day.

To the forward-looking men of Gesner's generation, time was important, with emphasis on scheduling man's working life to the clock. They admired people who got things done quickly. Thriftiness and looking out for tomorrow became more important than giving and sharing and living for today.¹⁴ The Highland Scots and Irish were still living life in the rhythms of the pre-industrial revolution period. They had no burning desire to fight the clock, nature and other people to accumulate wealth. People who would work to ensure that they and their families had enough to eat, a roof over their heads, and time for human relationships seemed so backward to Gesner and others of his type because of these basic attitudinal reasons. Since it was very clear to this progressive element that wealth, success and all else that was worthwhile were due to hard work and self-denial, the Irish mentality could only be

¹²Ibid., 334.

¹³Ibid., 338.

¹⁴Julia Saint and Joan Reid, Origins, Canada's Multicultural Heritage (Don Mills, Ont.: Academic Press Canada Limited, 1979), 23.

written down to a lack of intelligence and good character. This line of reasoning helps to explain why a man of Gesner's undoubted talents would write something that was disparaging of the nature of a people.

What irritated Joseph Howe with the Irish was their inability to be ardently pro-British, yet when he publically came to attack the Irish, Howe employed the language of the nineteenth-century improver. In a flight of anti-Irish prose Howe depicted them in terms that mocked their occupational status. "He suggested that the Irish were not keeping up with the times. The Irish in Nova Scotia formed "the grand army of Guagers, Haberdashers, Grocers, Attornies and Persons who have attacked a Shanty."¹⁵ Two years later, the Irish were still "cabmen, coachmen, shoe blacks, and chimney-sweeps",¹⁶ none of them industrial types of work.

Thomas Chandler Haliburton wrote The Clock-maker, first published as a book in 1836. The character Sam Slick offered a very dim view of the Irish and the sorts of work they were fitted for.

When the British wanted our folks to jine in the treaty to chock the wheels of the slave trade, I recollect hearin' old John Adams say we'd ought to humour 'em; for, says he, 'They supply us with labour on easier tarms by shippin' out the Irish.' Says he, 'They work better, and they work cheaper, and they don't live so long. The blacks, when they are past work, hang on forever; . . . but hot

¹⁵The Novascotian, 19 Jan. 1857.

¹⁶Ibid., 18 April 1859.

weather and new rum rubs out the poor rates for t'other ones.'¹⁷

Haliburton was perpetuating the image of the Irishman as slave labour or little better when he had this most popular character in the literature of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia express such an idea. In the context of the chapter, Slick's aspersions on the Irish arrive in the company of blows against the Scots, the blacks, the Jews and the English. The significant thing is that Haliburton treats each group by insulting them in the well-worn tracks of accepted prejudice and stereotype. If he causes Slick to call the Irish a useful substitute for black slaves and suggests that cheap rum will kill them, it is because those slurs were the common currency of Haliburton's day.

Reverend Dr. Thomas McCulloch was perhaps the most noted writer in Nova Scotia before Haliburton. McCulloch's series "Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure" appeared first in 1821-22 in the Acadian Recorder, a Halifax newspaper which was widely read in Nova Scotia. The learned doctor's views must certainly have been read by, and impressed themselves upon the literary lawyer.

In his Stepsure Letters McCulloch introduces an Irish school master, Pat O'Rafferty, whose characteristic quality is drinking heavily. Declining to become a priest, Pat assured his father that if he "wished him to be a spiritual man, he had not objection to be clerk . . . at the whiskey distillery. To the distillery, accordingly, he went; and in a short

¹⁷Thomas Chandler Haliburton, The Sam Slick Anthology (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1969), 31.

time, was the best judge of whiskey about."¹⁸ We last hear of O'Rafferty when he escapes jail, leaving behind "a number of empty bottles, and a note".¹⁹ The entire passage between Pat's entrance and exit refers to the Irishman satirically. Whenever Pat is mentioned he is drinking or drunk or crooked.

Pat might be dismissed as a literary invention but McCulloch made sure that he tarred many of the Irish with the same brush, a brush I may add, that smelled of alcohol. When Pat got into his first round of difficulties he fled to Newfoundland where "he amused himself all summer with cod-fishing. Here, though the grog in summer was very much to his taste, the prospect of starving in winter was not so comfortable. This induced him, with a cargo of his countrymen, to land upon our coast, late in the fall . . ."²⁰ There is more than a hint in this that the Irish who entered Nova Scotia via Newfoundland were not much more than a gang of impoverished drinkers. In view of the fact that so many Irish came to Nova Scotia following that geographical route,²¹ the further suggestion that they were tipplers might have been more readily believed.

¹⁸Thomas McCulloch, The Stepsure Letters (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1960), 39.

¹⁹Ibid., 47.

²⁰Ibid., 40.

²¹Terrence M. Punch, Irish Halifax: The Immigrant Generation, 1815-1859 (Halifax: Saint Mary's University, 1981), 7-9.

There is a touch of fun running through the treatment of the Irish, both by McCulloch and by Haliburton. A generation grew up in Nova Scotia who accepted this portrait of the Irish as drinkers and generally irresponsible fellows. Haliburton expressed it when he wrote that "it's different with the Irish; they never carry a pus, for they never had a cent to put in it. They're always in love or in liquor - or else in a row; they are the merriest shavers I ever see'd."²²

The literary banter found its echo in grimly earnest political commentary later on. William Gossip, a Halifax newspaper editor, took seriously the idea of Irish affinity for alcohol. In the 1830's Lawrence O'Connor Doyle, a member of the Legislature, threatened to call Gossip out or to take a whip to him for the latter's sarcastic hints in print that the honourable member couldn't hold his liquor.²³ Gossip escaped Doyle's wrath and went on to print further libels of the Irish as drinkers. The Irish Catholic newspaper was The Cross. In 1847 Gossip disliked its editorial policy and wrote that the "editors of The Cross wrote their editorials 'under the influence of potations stronger than holy water' . . .".²⁴ We need scarcely wonder what was superior in force to the blessed waters.

Twelve years later, William Annand, a future premier of Nova Scotia, was editor of The Nova-scotian newspaper. At a time when partisanship and religious prejudice were running strong, Annand

²²Haliburton, 30-31.

²³Terrence M. Punch, Some Sons of Erin in Nova Scotia (Halifax: Petheric Press, Ltd., 1980), 42.

²⁴The Times, 2 March 1847.

reported a political meeting at Hammonds Plains, near Halifax. He mentioned that two men had disrupted the proceedings. One was named and his nationality and state of sobriety left alone. The other was not named, but was described as "an Irishman a little the worse for drink."²⁵ We see that the stereotype of Irish drunkenness had seeped into public consciousness in Nova Scotia, and was helped liberally by literary gentlemen and political name-callers on the staff of local newspapers.

An honest picture of the Irish must acknowledge that they had trouble with drinking. The liberal use of liquor was a customary accompaniment to many Irish social practices, such as fairs and wakes. It is not the purpose of this paper to deny the widespread insobriety of the Irish, either at home or in America. To offer the generality of the Irish as paragons of abstinence would be to do historic truth a disservice. A study of the statistical data for nineteenth-century Halifax does support a conclusion that the drinking habits of the Irish here were not as different from those of their contemporaries of other ethnic origins as the literary evidence would indicate. In short, Irishmen drank, but they drank no more and got into no more trouble with it than the other parts of the Halifax population.

The greatest number of Catholic Irish to settle here arrived before 1845, and most of this majority came here between 1816 and 1845.²⁶ There had been a highly successful temperance crusade in Ireland, led

²⁵The Nova Scotian, 2 May 1859.

²⁶Terrence M. Punch, "The Irish in Halifax 1836-1871: A Study in Ethnic Assimilation" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1976), 41-51.

by Father Theobald Matthew. In 1846 with the outbreak of the Great Famine, his influence ceased.²⁷ Significantly, the heaviest Irish immigration to Halifax took place just when the cause of temperance in Ireland was at its greatest pitch. Not surprisingly this attitude was carried across to Halifax and reduced Irish involvement in liquor-related offences. Imitative temperance societies sprang up among Irish immigrants abroad, and Halifax had several organizations for such purposes.²⁸ For these and other reasons which will be introduced, some modification must be made to the customary image of the Irish, as presented in literary sources quoted or cited previously.

THE STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

The historian of the immigrants in Boston, Oscar Handlin, drew attention to an important aspect of the Irish involvement with drink and the law when he wrote that the

Irish reputation for criminality . . . actually derived from minor misdemeanors generally committed under the influence of drink . . . Comparatively few Irishmen were guilty of more serious felonies.²⁹

²⁷William F. Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), 346.

²⁸The Cross, 27 Dec. 1844.

²⁹Oscar Handlin, Boston's Immigrants 1790-1880; a Study in Acculturation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 121.

Contemporary Irish-American leaders were understandably concerned to get that point across to the majority population and, although they evidently had little success in doing so, they published the statistics. Between 1828 and 1832, for example, 2657 prisoners were lodged in four American prisons - Sing Sing and Auburn, N. Y., Wethersfield, Conn., and New Jersey State. Of this total exactly 150 were Irish, which amounts to only about 5.64%.³⁰ It seems that the flow of Irishmen through the courts consisted very clearly of those charged with minor offences liable to summary conviction, rather than with those proceeding to an indictment. Halifax will serve well as a sample study based on this model.

In terms of arrests and being charged in the Halifax City Magistrates Court, the Irish Catholics appeared somewhat less frequently than their share of the population would lead one to expect, while their proportion among those arrested for drunkenness was also slightly less than their share of the population. By careful calculation the Irish Catholic population of Halifax was 5,398 of 15,373 in 1838,³¹ and in 1861 it was 9,266 of 25,026.

³⁰Boston Pilot, 3 March 1838, 44.

³¹The census figures reported for the town in 1838 are lower than mine by over a thousand. For reasons explained in an appendix to "Halifax Town: The Census of 1838," The Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly, VI, 3 (Sept., 1976), 249-251, I have calculated the town's population at 15,373 rather than the official figure of 14,318 persons. If one uses the official figure, it strengthens rather than weakens my statistical argument, as the Irish Catholic component then rises to 37.7% in 1838 and provides an average of about 37.3% over the study period 1846-1861.

Assuming a fairly steady rate of increase the Irish Catholic population went up by .1% a year, from 35.1% in 1838 to 37.0% in 1861. An average from 1846-1861 would be 36.3%.

The Irish Catholic share of arrests should also have been at or near 36.3%. In fact, detailed study and analysis of 8,158 arrests in Halifax, 1846-1861, reveals a slight deviation from expectations, and that deviance is below rather than above the average. Of 8,158 arrests, 2,757 were those of Irish Catholics, a percentage of 33.7%, or 2.6% lower than their share of the population. Of 2,987 arrests for drunkenness, 1,034 (34.6%) involved Irish Catholics, which is 1.9% below their proportion of the populace. There were 532 Irish among the 1,400 assault charges, and 109 among the 276 arrests for vagrancy. If all these Irish vagrants and all these Irish assaults had involved people who had been absolutely drunk, there would have been 1,675 alcohol-related offences committed by Irish Catholics out of a total of 4,663. Even then, 35.9% of the arrests were of Irish, fractionally below their 36.3% of the population of the city.

These figures result from the examination of each case and recording those for which Irish persons were charged, and the charge laid, for most years between 1846 and 1861 inclusive. They prove as conclusively as anything else is likely to do that the Irish Catholics of mid-nineteenth century Halifax were not the drunken paddies of the literary caricaturists. There were a number of men who came before the court on drunk charges repeatedly and these would be our "winos" and "rummies". If these repetitious offenders had been counted as one individual rather than as "X" number of arrests, the Irish Catholic share would have been diminished even more.

Table I - Halifax City Magistrates Court, 1846-1861³²

Year (dates within the year)	I.-		%	No. of Irish charged for		
	R.C.	T		D	V	A*
1846 (1 Jan-19 Aug)	90	306	29.4	28	4	15
1848 (11 Jly-31 Dec)	93	304	30.5	18	5	27
1849 (3 Jly-25 Dec)	123	326	37.7	54	6	23
1851 (21 Jan-31 Dec)	190	498	38.2	93	11	46
1852 (1 Jan-25 May)	92	254	36.2	37	8	23
1853 (24 May-5 Nov)	214	621	34.4	82	4	29
1854 (21 Jun-31 Dec)	231	728	31.7	88	5	46
1855 (1 Jan-31 Dec)	347	1142	30.3	125	7	72
1856 (1 Jan-29 May)	122	364	33.5	30	6	23
1858 (3 Jun-31 Dec)	195	657	29.6	84	13	34
1859 (1 Jan-22 Jly; 13 Sep-31 Dec)	275	852	32.2	83	17	61
1860 (1 Jan-16 Aug; 25 Oct-31 Dec)	408	1041	39.1	158	13	73
1861 (1 Jan-13 Jly)	377	1065	35.4	154	10	60
Totals:	2757	8158	33.7	1034	109	532

*I.-R.C. = Irish R.C.
 T = Total
 D = Drunk
 V = Vagrancy
 A = Assault

³²P.A.N.S., R.G. 42, Series "A", 1820-1898.

In the higher courts the proportion of Irish Catholics was lower even than it had been in the Magistrates Court. The Court of Sessions for Halifax County heard fifty-two cases between 1851 and 1866 (years 1862, 1863 and 1865 missing), of which eleven (21%) involved Irish Catholics. Nine of the eleven cases were assault which came from Magistrates Court as the court of first instance. The other two cases were one each of larceny and window breaking.³³ Evidently the Irish Catholics were not major criminals!

The Supreme Court criminal convictions for Halifax between 1852 and 1861 numbered sixty, of which nineteen (31.6%) were cases involving an Irish Catholic.³⁴ The range of more serious offences tried in this court included such diverse charges as burglary, forgery, attempted rape, arson (a female), procuring a soldier to desert, unnatural crime (euphemism here for buggery), concealing the birth of a child, shooting, stabbing, and receipt of stolen goods.

In Halifax between 1847 and 1849, records show that there were one hundred and fifty-four imprisonments for debt. Of those debtors, fifty-six (36.3%) were Irish Catholics, and their percentage is exactly the same for debt imprisonment and as a share of the population.³⁵ The overall impression one must derive from the statistical evidence is that the Irish Catholics of Halifax got into their share of trouble; but no more than that.

³³P.A.N.S., R.G. 34-312, J.3.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., J.4.

If one wished to argue against these conclusions on the basis that many Irish Catholics were policemen and therefore inclined to treat fellow-countrymen indulgently, one would have to confront the fact that a police force is an agency of social control. Such an agency reflects the values and designs of those leading that society. The literary sources make it clear that these leaders were not friendly to the Irish Catholics and would have been unlikely to have overlooked any widespread favouring of the Irish by individual policemen for very long. In short, the pattern of arrests is probably consistent with the incidence of offences.

If the Irish of Halifax in the last century show up below their statistical probability where liquor abuse is concerned, they appear well above that median where occupational status is considered. For Gesner and Haliburton the Irish were backward fellows, unsuitable for work requiring intelligence or real effort, or unwilling to attempt work through natural indolence. They appear to have been mistaken about this point, too.

By using Handlin's work on the Boston Irish, we can make some comparisons between Boston and Halifax. The figures for Halifax are for the census years 1838 and 1871, while those for Boston are derived from the 1850 census. In Handlin's model the occupations fall into four broad categories, as follows:

- 1 - professional and major business;
- 2 - small business and white-collar;
- 3 - artisans, farmers, blue-collar;
- 4 - semi-skilled and unskilled workers.³⁶

³⁶ Handlin, 250-251.

The proportion of Irish within each of these groups follows:

Occupation Group	Boston 1850	Halifax 1838	Halifax 1871
1	0.6%	1.3%	3.5%
2	5.0%	15.5%	12.9%
3	24.7%	32.8%	41.0%
4	69.7%	50.4%	42.6%

These were the percentages of Irish Catholics in each group:

1	3.5%	5.3%	14.9%
2	8.4%	25.8%	23.7%
3	22.2%	27.1%	32.9%
4	72.1%	58.0%	41.9%

Two trends appear in these statistics. Firstly, the Irish in Halifax were higher on the occupational scale both in 1838 and in 1871 than were the Boston Irish in 1850. Secondly, the Halifax Irish had made significant advances between 1838 and 1871. Only for group four of the occupations does a later Boston figure come to hand.³⁷ In 1880, 52.5% of the labourers and servants in Boston were Irish, which is to say that 49.6% of the Irish work force in Boston about 1880 worked as domestics and labourers. It looks as though both Irish groups, in Boston and in Halifax, were getting ahead, but that the Halifax group was maintaining its lead.

Among the Irish in both cities the same three occupations were most common: labourer, servant, and tailor/dressmaker, in that order. In Halifax

³⁷ Ibid., 262.

these accounted for 42% of the Irish in the work force, while in Boston they amounted to 71% of this group. By 1880 these still comprised almost sixty per cent of the Irish work force in Boston. The Irish worker in Halifax in the 1870's was not as likely to fit the stereotype of a "paddy" as was his countryman living in Boston. Nonetheless, a person who was Irish and Catholic was statistically more likely to be a butcher, stonemason or truckman, for example, than he was to be a barrister or accountant. The Irishman in Halifax was more apt to be any of these than he was to be unemployed or a charge upon the community. According to the census of 1871, Catholic Irish made up 32.84% of Halifax's population - i.e., 9,716 of 29,582 people. The same group account for 33.43% of the employed work force - i.e., 3,372 out of 10,086 persons. These figures scarcely support the contention of Gesner that the Irish were idle or unsuited to employment here.

CONCLUSION

By the era of Confederation, the Irish in Halifax had suffered several decades of poor press. The authors of that period portrayed the Irish as heavy drinkers, unsuited and probably unwilling to perform useful work. When even the most general statistics of the mid-century are held up against the negative stereotypes, the latter can be seen to be mistaken or, worse, deliberate distortions.

If we accept the thesis of Lazarsfeld, Berelson and others, "a certain minority of the population are 'opinion leaders' - individuals whose greater knowledge, interest, and personality make them influential", we must attribute much of the majority attitude towards the Irish in Nova Scotia to Haliburton, Howe, Gesner and McCulloch, and authors like

them.³⁸ Without coherent spokesmen, such ethnic stereotyping and prejudice tends to remain undirected, random and of short duration, arising usually only in response to particular and temporary circumstances. It stands as a credit both to the Irish and the Nova Scotian majority population that the written opinion of so many 'opinion leaders' failed in its object, and now largely an historical curiosity.

³⁸Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944), 146.

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