

Milwaukee's Early Irish and the Role of the Church in Diasporic Urban American Settlement and Assimilation, 1890-1922

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Abstract

Anthropologists recognize social institutions, such as families, schools, marketplaces, and churches, to be integral to the survival of urban immigrant diasporas. Scholars such as Harold Mytum (1994), Michael Parker Pearson (1982), and Jörn Staecker (2000) view churchyard archaeology and the demographics of parishes as important tools in the study of historic corporate cultures and historic, transnational diasporas. This study addresses the corporate nature of foreign-born Irish immigrants arriving in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the last decade of the nineteenth century (c.1890-1900). The homogeneity of residential patterning associated with this Irish diaspora was tested by analyzing the parish records of Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church. The findings of this research project ($t(194)=1.49, p<0.05$) identified a diminished degree of residential variance in the parish community until 1922 when the neighborhoods surrounding the church became residentially pluralized. The results of this study indicate that similar analyses in other ethnic communities both in Milwaukee and elsewhere could lead to a better understanding of the forces operating both for and against assimilation in early immigrant urban communities in the United States. It also suggests that the Celtic identity of the Irish in America was integrally linked to their communal organizations in important ways.

Keywords

Anthropology, community, ethnicity, diaspora, Irish immigration, ethnic enclave, Roman Catholicism, parishes

1. Community, Practice, and Corporate Culture

Anthropologists recognize that the social and psychological notion of community emphasizes a shared sense of identity and place. Though the term community, as a pedagogical device, is not common to anthropological classrooms, it is important as a functional unit of analysis in general anthropological research. Lowell Holmes, in his description of Samoan churches in the late 1950s, used the notion of community and ecclesiastical (*ekalesia*) structure to demonstrate the

socio-cultural interactions that existed between Samoans and European settlers (Holmes 1960). During the twenty-six months that Holmes spent in the field, he defined church communities (*togas*) as typifying "the phenomenon of a particular culture *swallowing up* or reinterpreting a foreign theology" (Holmes 1960:68). In this case, the concept of community provided Holmes with an ethnographic model for explaining how Samoans dealt with culture contact, all the while preserving a shared sense of *fa'asamoa* (or the Samoan way). Holmes found that the isolationism of the village settlement preserved Samoan culture for its residents.

The concept of community becomes both social and physical when it is situated within group ritual. Richard Sosis and W. Penn Handwerker's examination of ritual and survival among Israeli women experiencing the Lebanese-Israeli conflict in 2006 highlighted the strong interplay between religious practice, social cohesion, and a developing national and social identity (Sosis and Handwerker 2011:40). In this case, the recitation of psalms became a practice that helped women to cope with the daily onslaught of violence, household unemployment, and communal displacement. Sacred and secular speakers identified the Israeli sense of community as consisting of a shared historical moment, transcending the violence that surrounded it. Furthermore, the shared experiences of speakers served to bind their ritual practices to a larger history of worship and ethnic identity (Sosis and Handwerker 2011:43). Sosis and Handwerker argue that the cohesion brought about through ritual practice reveals a community whose boundaries extended well beyond the experience of women living in northern Israel. Community, in this case, became a social and cultural phenomenon, which drew upon a shared language, a ritual practice, a physical place, and a history of struggle (actively binding together a communal past with a violent present and a prophetic future).

The institutions within a community that are responsible for public forms of worship and education become sources of socio-cultural production, reproduction, and political control (Bourdieu 1990a, 1990b; Durkheim 1954; Goffman 1956; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Weber 1921). Erving Goffman, in his study of the "urban secular world" (Goffman 1956:473) of the twentieth century, recognized the importance of institutionalized "rules of conduct" and their impact on patterns of human social organization. Institutions and the social roles and role players they housed, according to Goffman, become a principle means of enculturation in the urbanizing West (second only to the household). They create a network of knowledge and emotional tension that structures the obligatory relationships between community members (Goffman 1956).

Additionally, when these relationships are raised to the level of compulsory social forces they become sources of corporate coercion. The resulting constraints are wholly impersonal and external, whereas the adherence to them is sensed and experienced intimately.

Anthropologist Chiara De Cesari described the importance of nongovernmental and semi-governmental organizations in the establishment and maintenance of Palestinian nationalism (Cesari 2010:626). She recognized that, when institutionalized, practices and relationships tied to education, city planning, and political and economic leadership become principal structuring forces in a society. In the Palestinian case, they structured the ethnic community (Cesari 2010:631). Here, as in Goffman's (1955) study, face-to-face relationships, as social outgrowths of institutional roles and practices, become a means of social control. They produce a strict, social and cultural model for an individual's membership and social place within a community. In the urban, secular world it is the structure of a society and the practices therein that become the chief socializing mechanisms for membership as well as its cultural caretakers. Social institutions and the rituals assigned to them become repositories of a shared cultural history.

When social practices, whether by design or by accident, isolate the members of a community from an outside group they often intensify the community's corporate nature (Durkheim 1897; Weber 1910). Corporations of the kind described by Max Weber emphasize the obligations of community members and the social powers authenticated through varying expressions of ritual and secular belief. C.W.M. Hart and Arnold Pilling's work among the historic *Tiwi* of Melville and Bathurst Islands highlighted the importance of the social corporation as a protectorate. The cosmological approach taken by the *Tiwi*, for example, toward the organization of their society (exemplified by practices such as infant betrothal) staved off the acculturating effects of twentieth century warfare and colonialism (Hart and Pilling 1960).

A similar type of physical and social isolation to that of the *Tiwi* was described by Clark Gibson and Tomas Koontz in their study of the "community based management" of forest stands on indigenous land holdings in southern Indiana (Gibson and Koontz 1998:621). Gibson and Koontz found that the institutional, social values responsible for managing a community served to shape the personal sentiments of its members. The sense of stewardship that accompanied a child's introduction to the natural world contributed to a community's perceived right to manage local natural resources and to self-govern. Ultimately, the values of the Miami and Shawnee were at odds with external models of resource management, creating tensions between tribes and

international, federal, and state-level conservancy organizations (Gibson and Koontz 1998). In this case, isolation and corporate community structure preserved the cohesion of local tribal groups, presenting their interests as a single political and legal discourse.

In this study, I examine the role that Saint Patrick's Church (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) (see Figure 1) played in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century establishment and growth of the surrounding immigrant Irish community. Its corporate nature established a strong, historic diasporic community that became a source of important services and resources (e.g. employment, social activities, food, worship, etc.). Through annual events such as the Saint Patrick's Day Parade the church became the physical centerpiece of the social organization of the community.

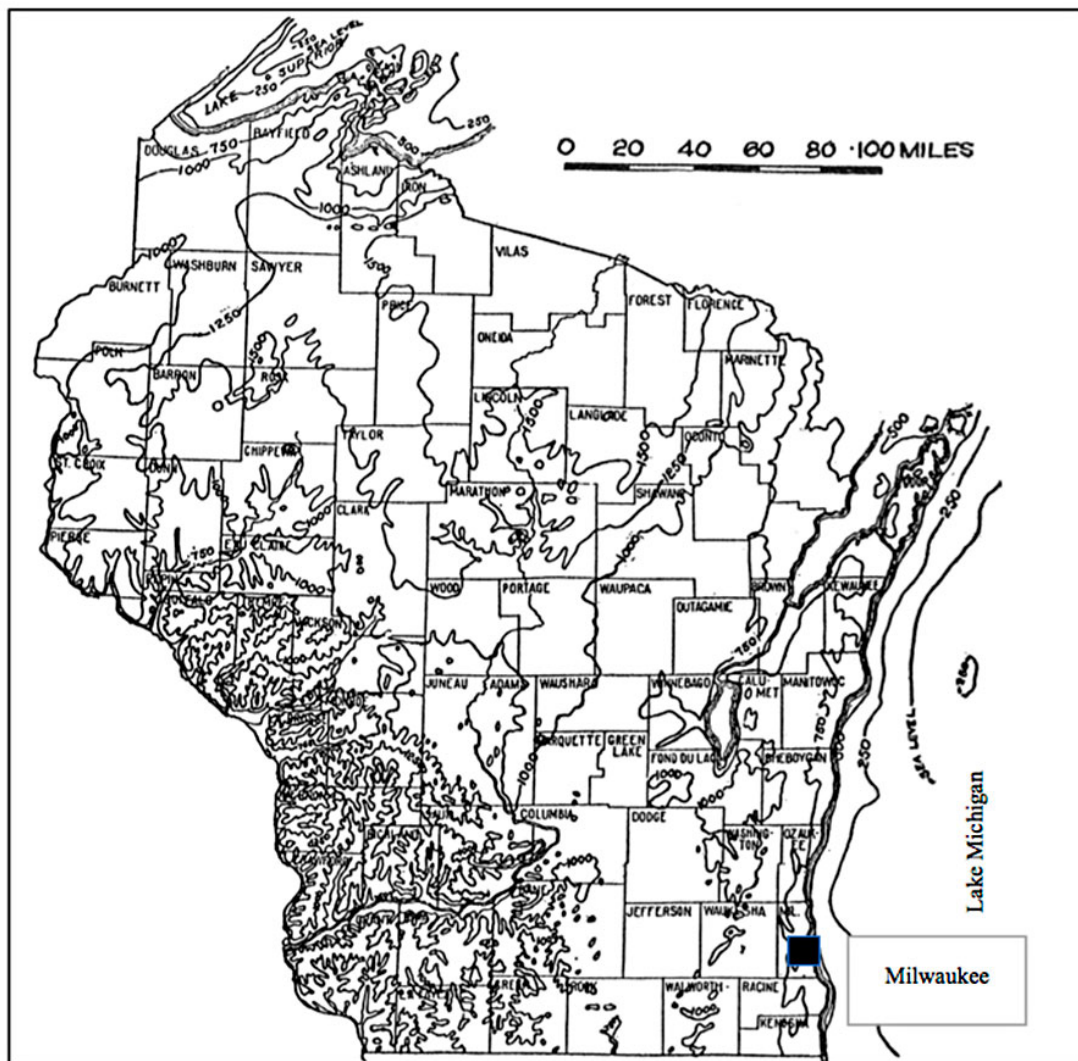


Figure 1. Project Area (modified from Martin 1965: 17).

2. Urban Planning as Social and Cultural Discourse

In his 2006 and 2007 study of street-side advertisement in Accra, Ato Quayson described the “African street as an archive of discourse ecologies” (Ato Quayson 2010:73). For Quayson the imagescapes of the transnational, urban world are an indigenous, ethnographic text. So too, the mental and literal maps of nineteenth and twentieth century cities like Chicago and Milwaukee (hostlands to waves of displaced European-American and other immigrant groups) were pedagogical resources not only for immigrants arriving on the shores of Lake Michigan but for modern researchers attempting to explain settlement patterns and the growth of ethnic enclaves.

The interactions between successive waves of immigrants and previous émigrés can be understood through an examination of the residential patterns in these growing, historic cityscapes. Philip Kasinitz’s study of the flow of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants into twentieth century New York highlighted the importance of the city plan as a marker for the relationships between turn-of-the-century immigrants and those who arrived at a later date. For Kasinitz, variations in the social and cultural connections between these generations of immigrants created tensions within the Caribbean geographies of Brooklyn, Queens, Harlem and the Bronx (Kasinitz 1992:60). However, as areas of concentrated West Indian settlement became the focal point for annual celebrations such as *Carnival*, generational tensions were subdued. Additionally, community activities created solidarity in urban neighborhoods and paved the way for imagined communities to emerge (Anderson 1983). According to Kasinitz, the Carnival parade became a “community dramatized” (Kasinitz 1992:133), a “superorganism” (Geertz 1973), defining and circumscribing the ethnic enclave, its history and its residents.

James Allen and Eugene Turner (2005) also examine the social-structural nature of ethnic enclaves in urban landscapes throughout the United States. Residential concentrations that are home to immigrant languages and social institutions include schools, not-for-profit publications, radio stations, and churches, all of which establish and maintain a sense of corporate culture (Allen and Turner 2005:283). In their study of foreign-born Asian and Hispanic populations in the U.S., Allen and Turner found that within urban landscapes, where residential ethnic concentrations were recorded as thirty-five to forty percent, the effects of hostland assimilation was strongly expressed (Allen and Turner 2005:278). In the case of Hispanic populations living

in Los Angeles, neighborhoods that exhibited residential concentrations of over sixty percent were found to act as a gateway environment for Mexican immigrants. Within these ethnic enclaves, languages and traditions were maintained, helping those newly arriving in the United States to preserve a sense of group security and control.

Parish communities, with their emphasis on ritual and tradition, often become gateway centers (Turner and Allen 2005:284) for successful resettlement. The psychological and social stress of immigration and a hostland's need to assimilate or control their transnational citizenry may be curbed by the development of a corporate culture of the kind described by Max Weber (1920) and Émile Durkheim (1995 [1912]). Though Durkheim did not directly assign a corporate nature or his notion of *collective consciousness* (1995[1912]:443) to faith communities, he did recognize the community-building effects of ritual and religious life (Durkheim 1995[1912]:42). According to Durkheim, "A church is not simply a priestly brotherhood; it is a moral community made up of all of the faithful, both laity and [priestly]" (Durkheim 1995[1912]:42).

Religion, then, becomes the orthodoxy of tradition socially circumscribing the church body. It is "a... unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" (Durkheim 1995[1912]: xxxiv); "things set apart and forbidden" to be the material outgrowth of "beliefs and practices which... [create a] single moral community" (xxxiv). Church orthodoxy, and a parishioner's choice to adhere to its principles, has the effect of collectively creating an authoritative, political and social entity (one that maintains its integrity through ritual practice) (Weber 1952[1917]).

The close relationship between practice and collective consciousness is a centerpiece in Pierre Bourdieu's study of Arab and Berber parallel-cousin marriage. Drawing upon the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss, Fredrick Barth, and Robert Murphy, Bourdieu identifies the impact that institutional events, such as marriages, have on the production and reproduction of social structure (Bourdieu 1999:52). According to Bourdieu, "collective beliefs" effectively create a shared sense of cultural history and identity, "reproducing the structure of social and ideological relations within which and through which the activity of [societal] production is carried on and legitimated" (Bourdieu 1999:59-60).

Charles Orser's (2006) study of the Irish demesnes of Coopershill (Co. Sligo, Ireland) exemplifies the social and structural reproduction that is possible within a homeland landscape. Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1990c) study of symbolic violence, Orser recognizes the close

relationship between a community's perception of space and the social actions of its members (Orser 2006:30). In this case, Coopershill becomes a pedagogical device for structuring the communal expectations of its residents. The demesnes, or country estates that embody the life histories of their English and Irish inhabitants, become historic templates for Elizabethan and colonial social order and control (Orser 2006: 31). In the modern era, the archaeology of these estates becomes a pedagogical text that is read and interpreted by anthropologists seeking to understand the "social relationships of power" (Orser 2006:31) that existed between the colonists and the indigenous peoples of Ireland. Anthropologist Patricia Galloway (2006) highlights the importance of reading cultural "text[s]" as a kind of "dramatis personae" (Galloway 2006:43). She cites Ian Hodder's (1986) notion that objects and spaces are not only textual but may also be pedagogical, serving as communicative devices. Here, the application of actor-network theory in anthropology becomes an important approach in reading the past.

Irish-American parish communities also reflect the kind of diaspora described by Benedict Anderson (1983). Associated patterns of residence, places of worship, and the sites of community interactions and events create congregations of individuals who share a homeland, a perceived ethnicity, a language, and a class identity. At the center of these parish communities is the church, the spiritual and moral social institution that serves as a physical contrast to the nature of urban life. Archaeologist Patricia Hart Mangan (2000) studied the relationship between a socio-political institution (in this case, European feudalism) and the biographical nature of domestic environments (Mangan 2000: 205). Mangan's work within the walled town of Montblanc, France, demonstrated that an individual's access to spaces within the community and select portions of its defensive architecture allowed him or her to experience the town in varying ways (Mangan 2000: 221). Socio-economic and political inequalities between town residents remained visible well into the eighteenth century; Montblanc's urban plan and defensive structure was a pedagogical device rooted in an earlier Medieval period that socialized successive generations of inhabitants into conforming to its spatial and social hierarchies. As in Orser's (2006) social study of the demesnes of colonial Ireland, residential patterns and the uses of landscape space became expressions of "built biographies" (Mangan 2000). They were physical texts to be read by later town residents.

3. Milwaukee's Foreign-Born Irish

For Milwaukee's foreign-born, English speaking, late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants, urban parishes defined the diaspora. Parish communities preserved the social and religious traditions of the homeland in a new hostland environment (Figures 2 and 3).

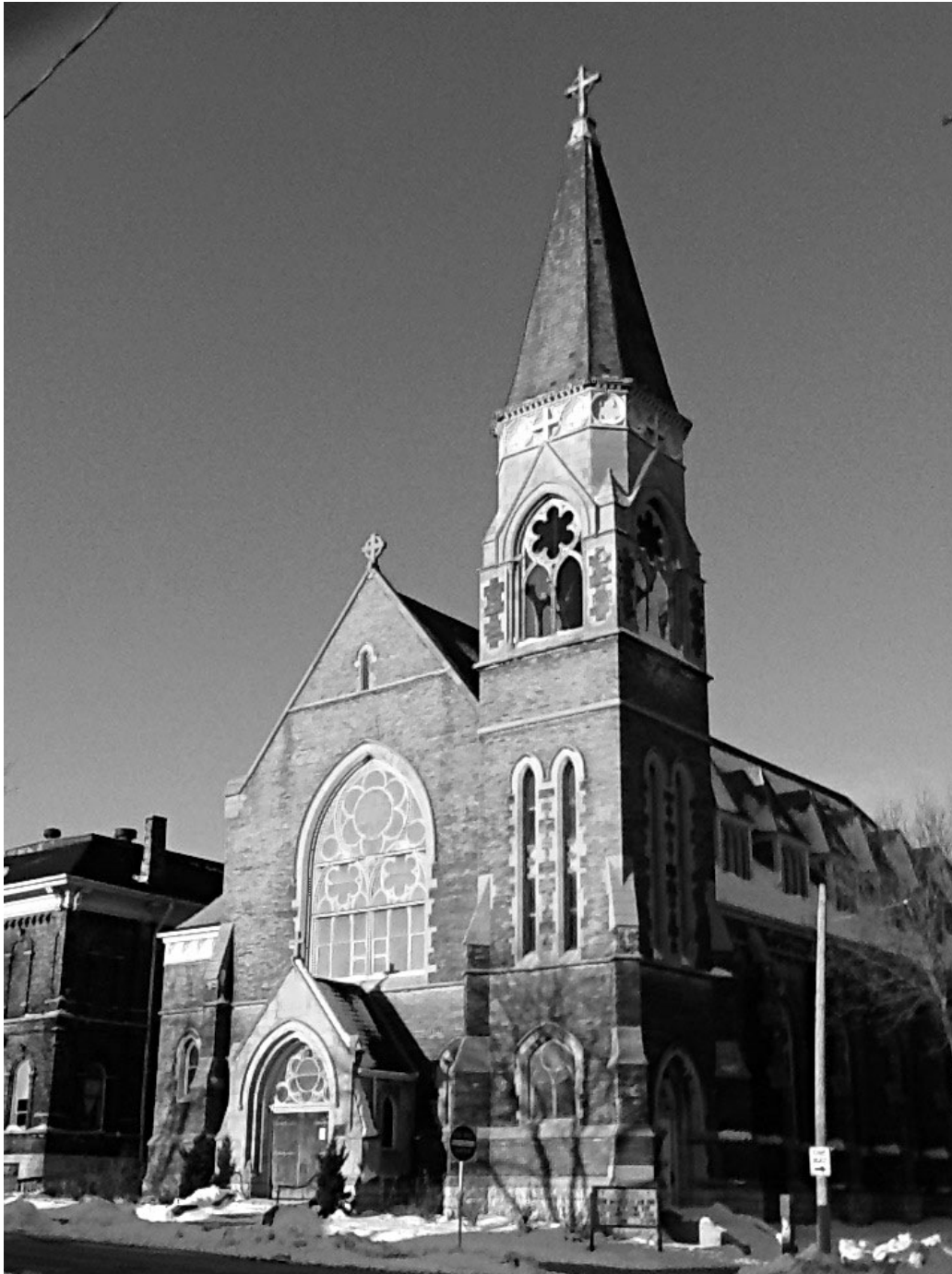


Figure 2. Saint Patrick's Church, eastern façade. Photographed from the NE corner of Second Street and Washington Avenue (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2013). (Source: Photo courtesy of the Department of Anthropology, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2013).



Figure 3. Fire Insurance map (1894) depicting the historical location of Saint Patrick's Church. (Source: UWM Libraries, American Geographical Society Library, 2013).

Irish immigrants arriving in the City of Milwaukee in the 1880s experienced nearly seventy years of ethnic isolation. Modern historians reconstructing the experiences of this initial wave of migrants, and a second wave beginning in 1900, have associated this cultural and demographic isolation with the nature of city itself.

Eileen McMahon (1995) attributes Irish isolationism in the urban landscape of the United States to internal as well as external causal factors. For the Irish, the nineteenth century was a time of aggressive Anglicization efforts in the Old World and a time of discrimination and fear expressed by unequal access to local, often unskilled, employment opportunities in the cities of the New World. This institutionalized discrimination typified the circumstances and experiences of the foreign-born Irish along the east coast of North America and the Midwest, where they

were an identifiable minority for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wisconsin was no exception (Figure 4).

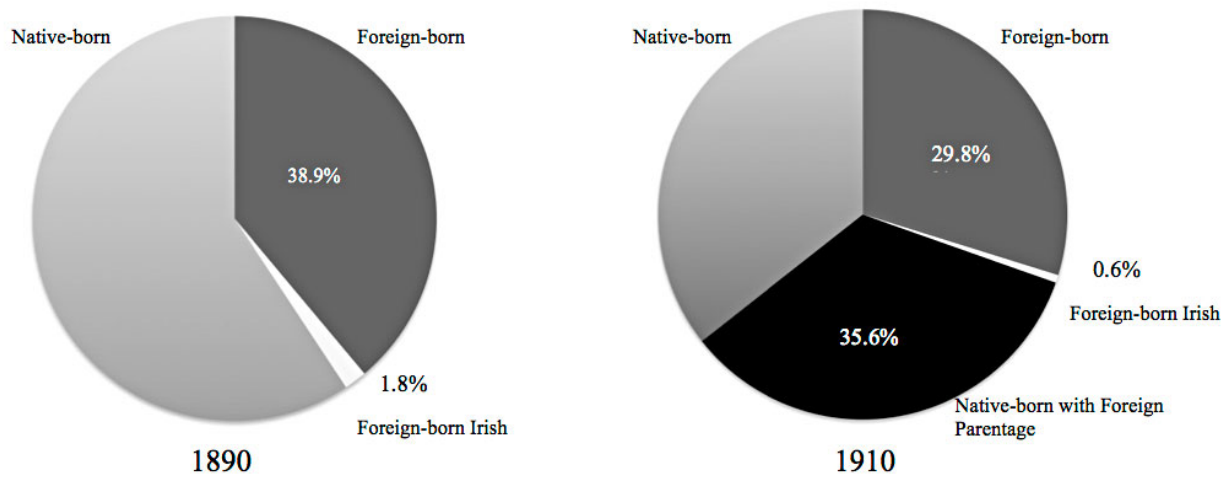


Figure 4. Ethnicity of Milwaukee residents, 1890-1910 (Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1890 and 1910).

In Ireland and frontier environments like Milwaukee and Chicago the traditions of the church allowed the Irish to preserve their ethnic identity in the diaspora (Farley 2011:7). Parish communities like Saint Patrick's provided immigrants with the means of survival in the form of an "abundant source of income, which, with hard work, sobriety, and thrift, would secure independence [for those] arriving penniless" (Baumbach, 1856: 261). By providing their residents with a parochial education (Figure 5), a platform for social events, and a social and economic network, churches were integral to immigrant survival in a growing urban landscape.

4. Methods

The membership rolls of Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church (c. 1890-1940) were the primary source of the data collected for this study. Directories of parishioners were randomly sampled and organized according to the worshiper's age, sex, and residence within each decade tested. The vital statistics gathered in this initial phase of the study were gathered into settlement pattern models corresponding to each decade of the fifty-year period. One hundred and fifty family surnames and addresses were recorded for each ten-year interval.

Additional data were drawn from burial permits dating from 1890 to 1920. These permits



Figure 5. Graduating class of 1920, Saint Patrick's parish school (Source: Photo courtesy of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee archives, 2014).

provided information relating to the name and location of local cemeteries that received, in this case, ninety-eight percent of immigrant burials. Calvary, Mount Olivet, and Holy Cross cemeteries were highlighted as the main burial locations for foreign-born parishioners. The choice of burial was used to further test the cultural and demographic homogeneity of the Saint Patrick's community. Burial permits were organized according to sex, age at death, last recorded residence, and surname.

All of the data gathered for this study were used to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics. Variables such as a parishioner's residential distance from the church and the modal age categories of deceased parishioners were used to generate *t* tests and Pearson correlations designed to assess the similarities or differences in demographic patterns in the decades between 1890 and 1920.

Parishioners of the late nineteenth century were compared to those of the early twentieth century. Data related to a family's residential proximity to the church, their pew registration number, contributions made to the church's school fund, a family-member's attendance at a

specific church activity (e.g. baptism, marriage, funeral, bazaar, etc.), and, if applicable, the location of family burials, were compiled, recorded, and analyzed.

Primary historical data were gathered from two locations. The first was the archives of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee (Milwaukee, Wisconsin). This archive, established “in accordance with Canon 482 of the Code of Canon Law” (Milwaukee Archdiocese Archives, 2002) contains historical records for over two hundred local parishes, covering one hundred and seventeen years of congregational history. The second source, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Golda Meir Library, houses historical records pertaining to Milwaukee churches and the surrounding urban landscape, including photographs, locally published magazines, newspapers, promotional flyers, documents related to local chapters of national religious organizations, architectural blueprints, city directories, and fire insurance maps. These collections provided important information regarding the history of Saint Patrick’s Church and the historic, urban plan for its parish neighborhood. The parish map utilized in this study, for example, was digitally scanned using Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in the American Geographical Society’s collection at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This provides an urban plan for Milwaukee’s south side districts prior to the municipal reorganization of the area in the 1930s and the expansion of the Milwaukee Corridor of Wisconsin Interstate Highway 794 in the 1960s and 1970s.

5. Results

This study has demonstrated that the isolationism and corporate structure of Milwaukee’s turn-of-the-century Irish can be related to their distribution across the cityscape. The type of social and religious organization that parishioners followed seemed linked to an inherent lack of residential fluidity combined with a multicultural urban environment. Additionally, the residential homogeneity of the parish created a rigid community structure—an ethnic enclave with the church at its center. With the construction of the church building in 1894, Milwaukee’s Irish immigrants became socially and religiously circumscribed.

Between 1890 and 1915, the developing church and school complex was a locational marker for the parish neighborhood. The settlement pattern of parish families (see Figure 3), demonstrates the central role of the church and its land holdings in residential choice. In this case, seventy-five percent of parish residences in the decades from 1890 to 1910 were

concentrated in a nine square mile area around the church. When each decade was independently studied and compared to other decades when the ethnic enclave was known to have developed, only minor fluctuations in the concentration were recorded. Statistical comparisons between the residential samples gathered in the decade starting in 1890 did not demonstrate a significant change in concentration when compared to the entire period; in fact, between 1890 and 1900, the ethnic enclave was at its peak period of residential ethnic homogeneity. Between 1900 and 1910, residential patterns showed signs of increased diversity; however, in comparison with the decades that followed, this trend was minor. Areas within the enclave that exhibited a homogeneity of seventy-five percent or higher fluctuated in size by only two tenths of a mile before 1910. When the residential homogeneity of this decade was tested against the 1890-1900 sample, no significant difference in residential concentration was detected ($t(194)=1.49$, $p<0.05$). By 1915, the residential concentration of the enclave demonstrated signs of significant diversification. The neighborhoods surrounding the church housed only thirty-seven percent of parish families ($n=194$).

This residential pattern, and others associated with the surrounding immigrant ethnic enclaves on Milwaukee's south side, created a patchwork of ethnic neighborhoods. Each of these residential communities was physically marked by the presence of a place of worship at its center. Milwaukee's south side Irish community exhibited the greatest residential density of these populations, concentrating all residents between 1890 and 1915 within a sixty-block area of the city bordered by Ninth Avenue and Clinton Street on the east and west and East Pierce and Lapham Streets on the north and south. Within this landscape, areas such as the five hundred block of south Second Avenue and the four hundred block of south Scott Street had the highest density of identifiably Irish parishioners at between eighty and ninety percent. Where significant concentrations were recorded there was a correspondingly high density of foreign-born residents. This was especially true for Irish immigrants renting and owning properties in the neighborhoods bordering Saint Patrick's Church and School. When the concentrations recorded for Second Avenue and Scott Street were examined for this study, all of the residents were identified as members of the church; of these, seventy-seven individuals, living in eighty-five households, were recorded as foreign-born. Moreover, within the next decade the foreign-born concentration remained the same.

Pearson correlations comparing residential concentrations to a parishioner's age at death,

annual donations to the school fund, and his or her family pew registration number expressed low to moderate relationships (see Table 1). Statistically, an explanation for this is not apparent; however the correlation between a parishioner's age at death and his or her residence was significant ($r(28)=0.27$).

Table 1
Settlement Pattern Comparison, 1900-1916

Variable	Comparison to Residential Proximity	Surnames Tested (<i>n</i>)
Age-at-Death	4409.31 (264.32) 0.27	28
Monies Donated to School Fund	3026.95 (79.78) 0.05	75
Pew Registration Number	12529.55 (491.86) 0.02	75

Note: The correlation coefficient (*r*) is the value in bold type. The sum of the multiplication of the independent and dependent variables is the first value to appear in the comparison column. The sum of the product of deviations (SP) is in parenthesis.

Mortuary traditions were also compared (see Table 2). Between 1900 and 1915 Saint Patrick's parishioners expressed a shared choice in burial plot. Calvary cemetery (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), for example, received over eighty-six percent of the church's interments. Parish records associated with these practices reflect the localized, communal nature of the parish's funerary activity and choice of burial. Between 1900 and 1915, three cemeteries accounted for ninety-six percent of the interments for the period. According to historian James Gummer

Table 2
Location of Saint Patrick's Interments, 1900-1916

Years	Cemetery	Number Buried	Percent of Total Interments by Period
1900-1909	Calvary	163	84.90
	Mt. Olivet	29	15.10
	Other	0	0.00
1910-1916	Calvary	80	68.40
	Mt. Olivet	8	6.80
	Holy Cross	17	14.50
	Other	12	10.30

Source: The Archdiocese of Milwaukee Archives; burial permits associated with Calvary Cemetery (1906-1911), Mt. Olivet Cemetery (1909-1916), and Saint Patrick's Catholic Church (1900-1916).

(1988), prior to the First World War, Catholic parish communities represented a strong potential market for local morticians and private cemeteries (Gummer 1988: 242). Priests often would purchase large tracts of cemetery space with the understanding that parish families would want deceased family members to remain close to their community and other families therein.

Parishioners of Milwaukee's ethnic enclaves emphasized the importance of burial choice among their members (Anon. 1976:7). In the years sampled for this study, only two priests conducted the funeral services for the Saint Patrick community: Hiram Fairbanks (serving the church community from 1881 to 1915) and John Morrissey (who served from 1915-1920).

The social cohesion of Saint Patrick's parish community began to unravel in the mid to late 1920s. The settlement pattern associated with parish families changed as the residential nature of Milwaukee's near South Side was transformed by a booming post-war economy and renewed interest in residential and commercial revitalization. Roger Simon's (1996) study of turn-of-the-century Milwaukee neighborhoods described the urban planning of 1900 to 1920 as a municipal and commercial reaction to the perceived social and economic *dysfunctionality* of ethnic enclaves (Simon 1996:1). As early as 1890, city administrators reinvented Milwaukee's urban spaces, focusing their time and money on the impact that city services had on the economic and social welfare of neighborhood communities. Byron Kilbourn, Frederick Pabst, and other community leaders attempted to use service revitalization to promote increased access to quality housing and commercially viable local industries (Simon 1996:18). Pabst recognized the church to be an important device for promoting opportunities for local employment and the need to take advantage of the resources available to parishioners, especially those recently arriving in the American cityscape. In Wisconsin, this progressive philosophy proved successful enough to inspire a socio-political movement emphasizing the "communion between *the* people and their leaders" (Thelen 1972:3). What came to be recognized as Wisconsin Progressivism was a political product of the marriage between the resources of the urban landscape and the need for a liberal, individualist philosophy in the minds of its residents. Then, from 1920 to 1922, the parish congregation began to diminish in size. In this case, church documents record the loss of over two hundred families (Anon. 1976:7). City directories identify many of these families as moving to the southern and western margins of the city. Their memberships appear in the logs of several English-speaking parishes, closer to their new residences.

6. Conclusions

Roman Catholic parishes throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were community-generating institutions (McMahon 1995:2). They provided parishioners with both an isolated residential neighborhood and a network of social and economic relationships. The networks associated with life within the parish became a means of survival for its residents, helping members to draw upon the resources of the surrounding community, while at the same time protecting them from the outside world. Ethnic parishes like Saint Patrick's became home to local chapters of the Catholic Big Brothers, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Holy Name Society, and the Catholic Knights of Wisconsin (Gummer 1988:88). These aid organizations provided economic relief for church members and their families, maintaining widows' pensions, providing monies for home repair costs, childcare services, and legal aid. While promoting the organization of the surrounding neighborhoods and their families, parish communities transformed the urban landscape, as they promoted an awareness of Irish secular and sacred traditions. Historian Martin Hintz (2003), in his brief history of Milwaukee's Irish population (1840-1990), describes the city's Irish communities as a product of church, parish and school (Hintz 2003:33). For Hintz, to understand the history and traditions of the city's initial Irish residents and later descendent communities, one must first understand the relationship between "church and service" (2003: 33). Unlike the experiences of the city's earlier, largely German immigrants, the religious community of the Irish parish supported its members in the surrounding urban landscape. Saint Patrick's church and school provided its neighborhoods not only with a political platform for progressive change and room for social gatherings but also with a centralized location for the provision of outdoor sources of relief, including medical and food resources (Trattner 1999). During the cholera epidemic of the mid 1850s, for example, the Irish church served its residents with both physical and spiritual treatment (Hintz 2003:33).

The households sampled for this study, their proximity to the church, and connections to important church festivals and cultural events made the church the social, pedagogical, and symbolic center to the lives of its parishioners. Statistical comparisons of settlement patterns and parishioner burials (c.1890 to 1922) demonstrate the strong relationship that existed between the choices of parish households and their worship spaces. This connection and its effectiveness in organizing the community-centered progressivism of Milwaukee's South Side became a pan-

Catholic, pan-Irish experience, dramatized in ethnic celebrations such as the Saint Patrick's Day Parade. This citywide celebration was hosted by Saint Patrick's parish as early as 1840 and set the standard for many of the ethnic religious events that occurred throughout the city (Gummer 1988: 231). The church hall, for example, was the gathering point following the conclusion of the morning parade. It hosted local speakers (including Irish and non-Irish politicians and Milwaukee businessmen), and a large feast that included both traditional foods of Ireland as well as contributions from local German and French restaurants. Saint Patrick's Church and school remained a centerpiece of the Irish festival cycle until the early 1920s when parade activities were overseen by members of a variety of community groups. Kenneth Moss (1995) describes the community actions of Irish-Americans as unique within the immigrant American experience. Irish identity, and the role of the community in its development, became a significant theme in the experience that immigrants had as they arrived in an already well-developed urban landscape. According to Moss (1995), festivals became a platform for Irish "national and sectarian" belief, reinforcing and recreating a communal sense of identity and memory (Moss 1995:126). Through communal ritual "and commemorative ceremonies," such as the St. Patrick's Day parade, Irish culture became tangible to its members (Moss 1995:126). Additionally, it was through these annual pageants, and the cycle of celebrations within the calendar of the Irish-American church, that a social drama—of the kind described by Turner (1974) and Goffman (1959)—became observable. It was also within this dramatic landscape that the structural constraints of the historical culture became "absorbed by individual consciousness" (Turner 1974:16). Today, it is the Irish Cultural and Heritage Center of Wisconsin (IHC) that provides its patrons with a similar, albeit largely cultural and secular, experience. Situated in the repurposed Grand Avenue Congregational Church Building (2133 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin), the IHC is a site for a "wide range of cultural and educational programs" including "concerts, lectures, art exhibits, dances, Irish music classes, and a center for genealogical research" (<http://www.ichc.net>, 2015).

Milton Gordon, author of *Assimilation in American Life*, describes ethnic enclaves as "decompression chamber[s] in which newcomers could, at their own pace, make a reasonable adjustment to the new forces of a society vastly different from that which they had known in the Old World" (Gordon 1964:3). The Irish community of turn-of-the-century Milwaukee and its associated parish neighborhoods became such a territorial social and physical space designed to

help its residents in their response to North American urban life. The settlement patterns associated with Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, along with the hundreds of burials, marriages, and baptisms that were overseen by its administrative personnel, contributed to a parishioner's sense of community. From birth to death, congregants had their cultural and religious identities reinforced by the church and its activities. Their education, along with social relationships provided through worship and religiously rooted voluntary associations, provided church members with a strong foundation for local community building. Today, these processes are at work among more recent immigrant groups in the United States. Jennifer Hirsch (2003), in her study of Mexican transnational families living and working in modern Atlanta (Georgia), emphasizes the importance that *fiesta* and faith play in the experience of the *norteños* as they return to La Piedad and Degollado, Mexico. Parade-like processions, such as the La Peregrinación del los Hijos Husentes, The Procession of the Absent Sons (Hirsch 2003:65), become social environments where identity and memory may be restructured and maintained. According to Hirsch, the pageantry of these social dramas and the institutions contributing to their organization and implementation is integral to the welfare of traditional Mexican family and community. In the same way, the historical documentation and interpretation of an Irish parish community such as Saint Patrick's provides both an understanding of how Irish immigrants of the 1840s and 1880s adapted to a new and foreign world and insight into the challenges faced by other members of the urban community. By first isolating and then assimilating its first generation immigrant parishioners, the church was an important social institution on Milwaukee's South Side, eventually becoming a landmark for the successes of the city's earliest immigrant populations.

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