

10-28-2013

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Recommended Citation

O'Leary, Deirdre (2013) "The Auld Sod: Staging the Diaspora at the 1897 Irish Fair in New York City," *e-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies*: Vol. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/ekeltoi/vol1/iss1/4>

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The Auld Sod: Staging the Diaspora at the 1897 Irish Fair in New York City

Deirdre O'Leary, Manhattan College

Abstract

The 1897 Irish Fair in New York City is significant for its map exhibit of a topographical map of Ireland, with soil from each county represented. For ten cents, participants could walk across the map and stand again on the soil of Ireland. This article examines the map exhibit as demonstrating diasporic nationalism of the late nineteenth century Irish emigrant, and also reads the exhibit as a contrapuntal political discourse on Irish nationalism, Anglo/American relations, and the position of the Irish immigrant in New York.

Keywords

Irish Fair, New York, Irish Palace Building Association, diaspora

A Palace to Ireland

You would build a palace to Ireland?
Then build it high and fair
With honour at its doorstep,
And courage on its stair,
With hope upon its roof-tree,
With truth upon its throne.
With brotherhood its pillars,
And love its cornerstone.
Let Irish art its beauty shower,
To deck its spacious walls;
Let Irish saints and heroes
Look upon you from its walls
Let Ireland's thrilling, moving tale
Be told there oftentime;
Let Ireland's harp awake its notes,
And Irish joy bells chime.
For you, who've borne the heavy load
Of the Old Land's dreary night,

Must lift your heart's and faces
 To the Morning's rosy light.
 Wide windowed to the sunshine
 Let the Irish palace be,
 So to catch the Irish breeze
 As they blow from o'er the sea.
 And there shall the faith of Ireland
 Live-deathless and secure,
 While her men are strong and fearless
 And her women fair and pure.

J.I.C Clarke (1897)

The poem, "A Palace to Ireland," was published on May fifteenth, 1897 in the New York newspaper *The Catholic Weekly Union* on the occasion of the opening of the Irish Fair in New York City. In the poem, the speaker's demands for an Irish monument are directed specifically to the Irish emigrant, who is imagined as a homesick exile. The speaker dreams of a palace that will physically convey and be supported by romantically imagined markers of Irish identity. Such a building was the goal of the Irish Palace Building Association, founded one year earlier, which used the fair, held from May tenth until May thirtieth at Grand Central Palace, as a fundraising effort to generate one million dollars for its construction (Figure 1). The Irish Palace Building was intended for the social and literary development of Irish immigrants and Irish Americans. According to the *New York Herald*, plans included a library, shooting range, gymnasium, and riding school.

IRISH PALACE BUILDING FAIR
 will be opened in
GRAND CENTRAL PALACE
 Lexington Ave., 43d and 44th Sts.,
 ON
MONDAY, MAY 10,
 at 8.30 o'clock, P. M.,
 BY THE
 Right Rev. Mgr. Joseph F. Mooney,
 Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of New York.
 The Hon. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW
 will deliver an address.
REVIEW AND DRESS PARADE,
 BY
 FIRST REGIMENT IRISH VOLUNTEERS
General Admission, 50 Cents.
 The Fair will be open Daily from 2 until 4.30 Afternoons
 and from 7.30 until 10.30 Evenings.
 DANCING and CONCERT from 10.30 until 11.30 Every Evening.

Figure 1. Advertisement for the Irish Fair. Printed in the *New York Herald*. 10 May 1897.

The fair was held under the general auspices of the United Irish Catholic Societies of New York, and was organized at the suggestion of Colonel James Moran, of the first regiment of Irish Volunteers, an organization of independent Irish military companies outside the government (Figure 2). It was largely organized and run by the Irish Volunteer Regiment and Clan na Gael, the militant nationalist society pledged to liberate Ireland by physical force (Ridge 1996: 284). The *Irish American* claimed that the fair operated with the support and participation of over five thousand people, largely drawn from the Irish county societies in New York. As historian John T. Ridge notes, enthusiasm for the fair ran so high that for the first time there were both men's and women's organizations in New York City for all of Ireland's thirty two counties, even if some lasted no longer than the fair itself (ibid.:285).

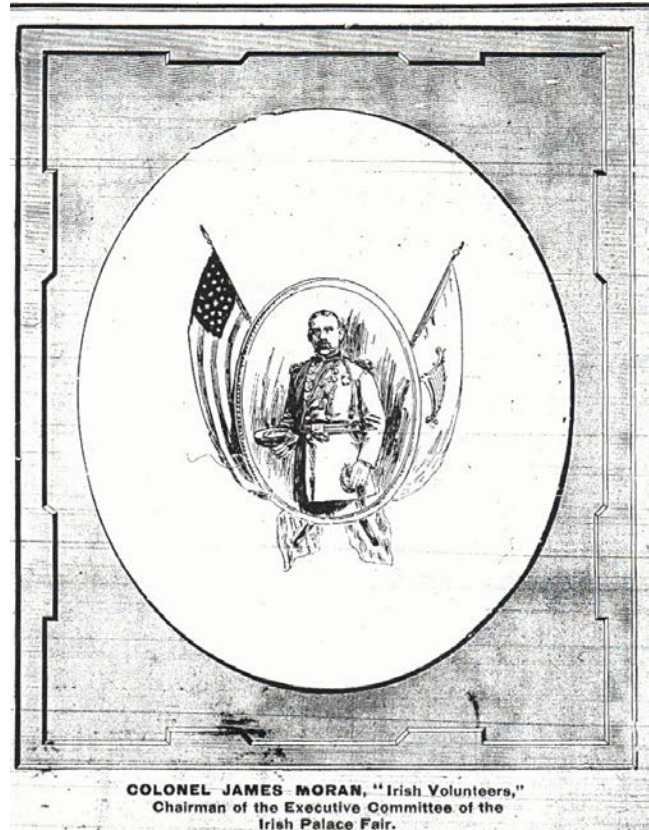


Figure 2. Promotional image of Colonel James Moran. *Irish American*. 31 May 1897.

Promotional material for the fair boasted that the fair booths, demonstrations, and exhibits would, according to the *New York Times*, “transport the visitor, as far as possible, into the very vicinity and local surroundings of Ireland” (Irish Fair Opens Tonight p. 2). Descriptions of the fair, particularly those of the *Irish World*, *Irish American*, and *Catholic Weekly Union*, were shaped by nineteenth century romanticism and Victorian sentimentalism. Fair booths, manned by Irish women described by the *Irish American* as “fair daughters of Erin”, showcased native crafts, foodstuffs and items of socio historical interest (The Great Irish Fair (b) p. 5). Fair attendees could view the following: earth from Charles Stewart Parnell's grave, sod from the Hill of Tara and the mounds of Clontarf, an oil painting of Robert Emmet, a portrait of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, a large scale replica of Blarney Castle (large enough for two men to stand in its turret),¹ complete with a piece of the Blarney Stone brought over, and a facsimile of the famous

Cross of Glendalough. The New York Commissioner James McCullagh brought over a quantity of Irish canes, umbrellas, and rustic chairs, made on the Parnell estate in Wicklow, the gift of John H. Parnell, M.P. the *Irish American* wrote of the appeal the relics and curios had for the public, linking the relics, both actual and reproduced, with a nostalgic construction of home. The paper also provided the most comprehensive list of items available for view or purchase:

The heart of the Irishman is always ready and willing to be touched, and nothing so quickly reaches it as a token from home—a something that recalls his youth and the old homestead, or that brings back the tales his father may have told him of the lives and the deeds of the men of his race. Here may be viewed a miniature Blarney Castle, with its world-famed “kissing stone”; representations of St. Kevin’s baptismal font; the doorstones of Glendalough; the wishing cross of Glendalough; St. Kevin’s wishing chair; and the Treaty Stone of Limerick; a beautiful wreath of Beleeck porcelain; Irish peat; and Irish donkeys; the original lease of “Conciliation Hall,” in Dublin, and the regalia worn by Daniel O’Connell when he laid the cornerstone of the building, in the old Repeal days; and also a copy of Robert Emmet’s speech printed on parchment in 1803. There is also an Irish jaunting car; an Irish spinning wheel over one hundred years old; antique Irish furniture; and specimens of Irish frieze, Irish linen and Irish poplin manufactures, and ancient Irish tapestry, Irish bacon and many other products of the Old Sod, are available for sale. (Our Irish Fair (b) p. 1)

The fair was widely covered throughout its duration by New York newspapers, including *The New York Herald*, *New York Times*, *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, *The New York Journal*, *Irish American*, *Catholic Weekly Union*, among others. Over twenty days the *New York Times* ran two features and multiple announcements about the fair, the *New York Herald* ran six and the *Irish American* ran six, which is not insignificant given that during that same twenty day time period newspaper headlines were also documenting the growing rebellion in Cuba, Queen Victoria’s jubilee celebrations and the Greek-Turkish war. While the fair does not appear to be documented in newspapers in Ireland, the *Irish American* noted, “Not only has the movement found favor in New York and surrounding cities, but letters of encouragement, donations and subscriptions have come from Ireland, from far-off Australia, from Canada, from Mexico and from every part of the Union, showing that Irishmen all over the globe are taking an interest in the affair” (Our Irish Fair (a) p.1). The *New York Herald* went so far as to suppose in print on May tenth, the day of the fair’s opening, that the “Irish Millennium may be at hand” (Irish Millennium p. 11).

Accounts of the fair attendance varied according to the papers, but the fair was generally reported a tremendous financial and social success for the Irish Palace Building Association.

The Irish World reported that reported a tremendous financial and social success for the Irish Palace Building Association. *The Irish World* reported that within a half hour on opening day the entire stadium was packed and hundreds were turned away (At the Irish Fair (d) p.6). Other slightly less celebratory accounts noted that attendance generally averaged an impressive five thousand spectators per day. This would be approximately one hundred thousand visitors in total in a city of almost three million residents (McCaffrey 1996: 217). Though it did not come close to raising the hoped for million dollar goal, according to the treasury reports of the Irish Palace Building



Figure 3. Exterior of American Irish Historical Society 991 Fifth Avenue. <http://www.aihs.org>

Association, the fair raised approximately \$35,539.² The monies were eventually donated to the American Irish Historical Society to supplement the cost of the purchase of its current home at 991 Fifth Avenue (Figure 3).³

As Colleen McDannell notes, parish fairs and metropolitan charity bazaars were a significant feature of nineteenth century Irish American Catholic identity, and were so much a part of the American cultural life of the late nineteenth century that they appear a cultural given (1996: 236). According to McDannell, fairs were particularly popular in New York City during the 1870s through the 1890s, perhaps inspired by the 1864 Metropolitan fair in Manhattan and the 1876 Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia. The monies raised at the 1897 Irish Fair were dwarfed by the monumental Civil War fairs of the 1860s, which in some cases raised over a million dollars,⁴ yet the extended journalistic coverage of the Irish fair was distinctive. The fair had its share of scandal when the papal stole once worn by Pope Leo XIII, valued at three thousand dollars, was stolen from its display, allegedly by Grand Central Palace waiter William Rice, who had been under previous police scrutiny after the murder of Mrs. Flossie Murphy, aka

“Diamond Flossie,” a wealthy west side resident (Papal Stole is Missing Still p. 1).⁵ Fair attendees also got a lively visit by Native Americans, including Chief Rain-in-the-Face, John Charging Horse and twenty five others who were performing with WC Cody’s Wild West Show across town (Figure 4). When Chief Rain-in-the-Face visited the fair, he addressed the crowds and made an impassioned plea for Native American rights, and refused to kiss the replicated Blarney Stone, on account of its being, in his words, a “white man’s idol” (Figure 5).⁶ And there were the quaintly amusing, if bewildering, fair attractions comically documented by the *New York Times*, like Mascot, the can-eating goat of Dublin, who had a bucking contest with a Harlem billy goat, winner never specified, and activities like the donkey races, where the last animal to cross the finish line wins (At the Irish Fair (a) p. 5).



Figure 4. Chief Rain-in-the-Face and fair organizers standing on the map of Ireland. Illustration printed in the *New York Herald*. 14 May 1897.



Figure 5. Chief Rain-in-the-Face examining the Blarney Stone. Illustration printed in the *New York Herald*. 14 May 1897.

But what got the most attention and proved to be the biggest moneymaking exhibit for the fair organizers was an attraction sponsored by the *New York Journal*. It was a giant topographical map of Ireland, with each of the thirty two counties filled with the native soil of each. The *Irish World* reported:

In a long, rectangular space, fenced off within a space that forms a promenade around the

four sides, and entered by five columned archways, surmounted by a huge green shamrock, is, upon the floor, a topographical map of Ireland, marked off into thirty two county spaces, cast in the exact form of the Irish county it represents. These spaces are filled with the veritable Irish soil of the county, gathered by McVeigh and duly attested as truly genuine. For the low price of ten cents one can tramp all over Ireland. It was a clever conception, that has given great delight to thousands who never thought to stand again on Irish soil and many a pathetic scene is witnessed daily (At the Irish Fair (d) pp. 6-7).

The *New York Tribune* provided its own description as well:

Probably the most attractive feature of the fair is a geographical miniature of the green isle which covers nearly the whole of the centre of the main floor. Each county in the map is covered with soil brought from the county in Ireland to the fair, so that for a small outlay the Irish visitors can literally not only once more place their feet upon their native soil, but even upon the ground of the county of their birth (Opening of the Irish Fair p. 2).

Irish cultural historians Fintan O'Toole and John T. Ridge cite the *Irish World's* description of the map exhibit in their work, but do not write of the exhibit as anything more than a moneymaking venture for the Irish Palace Building Association (Ridge 1996: 285) or a clever display of "pathetic scenes witnessed daily" (At the Irish Fair (d) pp. 6-7), Irish men's and women's performance of piety towards a distant home (*Ex Isle* p.130). O'Toole argues that the fair exhibit was successful largely because it traded on an easily accessible display of nostalgia (1997b: 131), which, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, is an integral part in the creation of the myth narrative of home (Anderson 1983). From the Greek *nostos*, "to return" and *algos*, "a painful condition," nostalgia originally described a potentially fatal form of homesickness observed among Swiss mercenaries serving abroad in the seventeenth century (Smith 2000: 510). Ray Cashman, in his article "Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland", argues that during the nineteenth century, the disease (as it was thought) came to be considered a debilitating emotional disorder, not only for soldiers, but also for immigrant laborers, factory workers, and other former rural dwellers experiencing the dislocations caused by industrialization and modernization (2006: 139). As Kimberly Smith observes, "Once defined simply as a desire to return...to a specific place, nostalgia was gradually being conceptualized as a longing to return to a former time—and usually a time the patient only imagined to be better" (2000:512).

Sociologist Henry Glassie notes that all narratives of the past—all forms and constructions of history—are unavoidably selective and function in large part as social charters

(2004: 961-968). But nostalgia, for our purposes, is best understood as a cultural practice that enables people to generate (and perform) meaning in the present through a selective reading of the past. The Ireland mapped out in front of fairgoers in 1897 was thus largely represented as a place half-remembered and half-imagined, a place shaped as much by myth as by lived history. This understanding inherently situates and celebrates Ireland in 1897 as a pre-modern, pre-industrialized homeland anachronistically placed in the present urbanity of multitudinous New York City. The Ireland of the fair exhibit is positioned as cultural and economic Other to 1897 New York in much the same way that postcolonial theorists argue that Ireland in the nineteenth century was invented, to use Declan Kiberd's term, by Britain's colonial apparatus (1995). Irish Postcolonial theory, largely following the line of critical inquiry begun by Kiberd, David Lloyd and Terry Eagleton, among others, has been instrumental in pointing out the political and cultural positioning of nineteenth century Ireland as artificially oppositional to British modernity.⁷ Kiberd in particular charges that Irish revival literature and drama must be read as operating in conscious acknowledgment of the British colonial construction (Kiberd 1995). But as David Lloyd notes, these are always contested positions (Lloyd 1993)—there are always tensions between state-oriented nationalisms, and the non-statist movements which entail a different temporal logic. I'm interested in reading the map exhibit beyond the performance of nostalgia, to see how it specifically articulated a nationalist position for pre-revolutionary, 1916 Ireland, as well as how it mitigated a vision of the Irish immigrant who was often blamed for the levels of crime and social disorder in lower Manhattan. In this way I agree with O'Toole that the exhibit affirmed a nostalgic construction of Ireland (1997b), but I also maintain that it made canny use of the romantic imagination to make a statement about the turn of the century Irish diaspora and the Irish nationalist movement. One must ask how complicit were turn of the century Irish fair organizers in producing a performative map exhibit that displayed a kind of Irishness that was itself a construction?

Political Resonances in the Fair Exhibit

It is useful to consider the performative effect of the map exhibit and how these scenes of reunion might have been read by journalists and fair spectators. While the presentation of the soil may have been the initial attraction, the participation of the Irish immigrants and their children who stood on and walked across the soil became the sustaining attraction for the public as well

as the press. *The Catholic Weekly Union* conceded as much, describing the map exhibit in the following quasi evangelical tones: “A ticket and a pleasant word from Walter O’Malley leads you into “Ireland personified,” as an angel would lead you into Paradise. Only you have a wish to make and a cross to kiss, and a few other little things that perhaps you would not be called on to do inside the ethereal throne” (The Irish Fair (b) p. 1). The religious description is not altogether unexpected, and it segues immediately to a direct call for Irish independence. “When you step on this Hibernian soil there is something magnetic about it after all which gives one an individuality of self-rights and possession. That’s what the “real” Ireland ought to have; it belongs to them, it is theirs and they will get it in the end” (The Irish Fair (b) p. 1).

The overt call for Irish nationhood is neither singular nor surprising. Certainly by 1897 the cry for Irish independence had been voiced repeatedly, though the voices of militant Irish nationalism had been tempered by the defeats of home rule in 1886 and 1893, the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1890 and the subsequent collapse of the Irish National League. This was particularly true in America. As David Brundage observes, as early as 1881 the Irish National Land League of America had organized more than fifteen hundred branches around the United States and had raised more than half a million dollars, drawing especially heavy support from the Irish American working class (1996: 321). Kerby Miller writes that over the same decade half a million Irish Americans joined the Land League to support the contemporary Land War against Irish landlordism (2008: 267). From 1883 through 1916 smaller but still significant numbers joined organizations and donated money to aid the constitutional-nationalist campaign for Irish Home Rule. While other cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Chicago also witnessed significant nationalist activity in these years, New York remained the epicenter of the movement, the main locus of activities for constitutional home rulers and separatist revolutionaries alike (Brundage 1996: 322).

Brundage argues that by the 1890s, the unity of Irish nationalism in America that had been so strong in the 1880s had dissolved somewhat and did not grow significantly until after the Easter rising of 1916.⁸ He writes that actual Irish American nationalists were fewer in number, “a small cadre of activists and propagandists who struggled to follow their movement’s dictum, in time of peace, prepare for war” (ibid.: 322). But this does not mean that the desire for an autonomous, independent Ireland was not present. New York newspapers were regularly covering stories about the Land Wars, Land Commission and burgeoning nationalist movement.

On May 29th 1897, the *New York Times* reported that the Irish Parliament adopted a resolution declaring that the Irish Parliamentary Party would not take part in the celebrations of Queen Victoria's jubilee, occurring nearly simultaneously with the Irish Fair, on the grounds that "the demonstration is not simply commemorative of the private and public virtues of the monarch, but is mainly imperial jubilation over the development of the principles of self-government and the growth of prosperity, wealth, comfort in which Ireland has not shared" (Queen's Jubilee p. 7).

And on May sixteenth, the sixth day of the fair, the *New York Times* reported "there is a chorus of denunciation from the Liberal and Nationalist press at the announcement, made by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Mr. Gerald Balfour, that a Royal Commission will be appointed to inquire into the working of the Irish Land Commission" (The Irish Land Commission p. 19). The members of the Opposition accused the British government of attempting to intimidate the sub-Commissioners against reducing rents, and declared that the group was only acting in the landlords' interests, for whom it was expected to recommend relief. This was largely seen as a conciliatory gesture to Protestant and absentee landowners.

While the map exhibit did not specifically comment on either the Jubilee or the Land Commission, the image of solitary Irish men and women standing on the map's Irish soil, repeated thousands of times over the hours of the fair, in front of a viewing public that included photographers and journalists, offers a stirring rebuttal, whether intentional or not, to the question of whose Irish land it was. The spatial associations and coherence of the map can be thus read as a kind of counter cartography, suggesting a national whole that metaphorically articulates the separateness of Ireland from England and the emotional proximity it enjoys in the hearts and minds of the Irish in America. New York politician and attorney Chauncey Depew⁹ noted as much in his address on the fair's opening night when he pointedly remarked, "We are all familiar with fairs for churches, charity and patriotism. Ireland needs no fair, all she asks is justice! This is a fair of the United Societies of America. Divided Ireland has always been a prey to her enemies: united Ireland has always won so long as she remained united" (At the Irish Fair (d) p. 6). According to the *Irish World*, "The Doctor pointed to the miniature Emerald Isle in front of him on the floor and remarked that it was the first time he had seen Erin fenced in. He said he travelled all over the island from Queenstown to the Giants Causeway, and he always thought that it was a good thing for Scotland that the great road had been washed away" (At the Irish Fair (d) p. 6).

These sentiments echo those made by Depew in a speech given three years earlier at the annual Friendly Sons of St. Patrick¹⁰ dinner in New York City, where he argued that what he referred to as “true” Irish identity was sustained by the porous demographics of the United States. “There is no country in the world where the Irishman is thoroughly himself except in the United States. He becomes a marshal in France, a grandee in Spain; he becomes a Pasha among the Turks, but when he comes over to this country he is purely and simply an Irishman.”¹¹

Depew’s comment is interesting, though he implicitly suggests that being “purely and simply an Irishman” is an identity fixed and contained by a lens so narrow the narrative is confined to one solely informed by penitent longing. Certainly there are multiple ways to be an Irishman, but inherent in Depew’s observation is an acknowledgment of the conventional representation of the Irish as exiles. How does this exile narrative serve hopes for Irish American upward mobility? And how does this exile narrative find expression in New York at the Irish fair?

To understand the map exhibit as articulating this trope of diasporic nationalism of the late nineteenth century is to understand it then as successfully bringing together three traditional currents of nineteenth century Irish protest: the revolutionary republicanism of the Fenians, the efforts of parliamentary leaders like Parnell to achieve home rule, and the social and economic struggles of the agrarian poor. “Christ himself was but an evicted peasant,” Dr. Edward McGlynn, pastor of the sprawling working-class parish of St. Stephen’s in Lower Manhattan, told a rally for Irish republican Michael Davitt organized by the Central Labor Union in June 1882, five years before the fair (Brundage 1996: 324). Such a comparison privileges the traditional narrative of Irish emigration as forced exile, even if that wasn’t always the case.

Irish Immigration to New York in the Nineteenth Century

The Irish history in New York essentially begins in the mid-nineteenth century, with the Great Migration. Between 1847 and 1851, 1.8 million immigrants came to New York, of whom approximately 848,000 were Irish. This figure represented twelve percent of the city’s total population, and the number would steadily rise over the years. By 1870, the Irish percentage in New York had climbed to twenty one percent of the city’s total. In 1860, according to Kevin Kenny, one in four residents in Manhattan had been born in Ireland and one in every six in Germany (2000: 106-107). The 1880 U.S. Census, which began to count both place of birth and

parents' place of birth, estimated that a remarkable one third of all New Yorkers stemmed from Irish parentage, truly giving credence to a comment made by a French visitor to New York: "Emigration will soon cause it to be said that Ireland is no longer where flows the Shannon, but rather besides the banks of the Hudson River" (O'Grada 1980: 93).

Yet despite the growing numbers of Irish in New York throughout the nineteenth century, the narrative of the Irish emigrant as unhappy exile, which began with the Great Migration, remained largely unchanged. This construction of the Irish immigrant has long been the narrative of the Irish diaspora in America by most scholars of immigration history, including Florence Gibson, Edith Abbott, Carl Wittke, and Thomas Brown, among others. "Many Irish-Americans had moved back to the United States physically," Gibson wrote in 1951, "but spiritually and emotionally they were back home in Ireland" (1951: 329). Historians such as Gibson have based this exile narrative on the thousands of Irish emigrant letters, diaries and memoirs extant, like this one from a Catholic from County Limerick: "In spite of all I can never forget home... At night when I lay in bed my mind wanders off across the Continent and over the Atlantic to the hills of Cratloe" (qtd. in Miller 2008: 10). Yet as Kerby Miller has pointed out, "not all Irish emigrants regarded themselves as exiles, or as victims of British oppression, or even as acutely homesick. But large numbers of them certainly did so, if not always consistently, and their letters suggest why the image offered so persuasive and unifying a sentiment to the politics of Irish-American nationalism" (ibid.: 11). As Irish immigrants began to ascend the social, economic, and occupational ladders in the United States, the singular narrative of sorrowful exile remained intact. David Doyle has shown that by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the American Irish (including U.S. born children) had achieved relatively decent levels of socio-economic status and political influence (Doyle 1976: 36-90). Irish Americans dominated municipal politics in numerous major cities, including in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. These urban power brokers enabled an increasing number of Irish to achieve or even surpass educational and occupational parity with the larger American population, and to far exceed the standard of living of the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. As John Paul Bocock writes, Irish Americans of the 1890s enjoyed more power, wealth, and influence than ever before. The number of Irish Americans in manual, unskilled jobs was on the decline, though they played a significant leadership role in the emerging labor movement (1894, reprinted 1976: 190-191).

While Irish immigrants to the United States in 1897 still faced pressures and privation,

and many faced extreme poverty, Doyle charts the curious trend among prosperous as well as poor Irish Americans in expressing the same basic sentiments of exile. He writes that, for all its achievements, the Irish-American Catholic community at the turn of the century was still characterized by a “self-indulgent communal morbidity” (1976: 334). This image of the homesick exile was a powerful one and was used not just as a rhetorical device, but as part of a narrative of diasporic nationalism. The Irish immigrant is removed from, but still emotionally connected to a distant home, which is unable to compete economically and technologically with America. This narrative acknowledges the moral force of a nostalgically constructed Ireland but simultaneously reaffirms the political dominance of America, specifically the urban center of New York. The *Irish American* went so far as to suggest that this clearly defined, if limited narrative was the very reason for the success of the 1897 Irish Fair. These qualities, the *Irish American* opined, had been conspicuously lacking in the 1876 World’s Fair in Philadelphia:

The so-called “World’s Fair,” held here less than half a century ago, was a practical fiasco, though it had behind it the backing of the National, State and Municipal governments, and took place in an era of business prosperity. The reason was that it was, mainly, a selfish speculation—in imitation of the English World’s Fair, which, also, did not pay expenses, and only served to show up John Bull’s selfish commercial peculiarities in their most unattractive forms. The absence of the inspiring element of patriotism, of genuine National feeling, was the source of the failure of these expositions. It is the presence—the pervading influence—of that National feeling, for which our people have always been distinguished—that gives the best assurance of the success of this Great Irish Fair, in which not only the people of every district in the Old Land will be represented, but also their kindred and connections in the greater Ireland that has grown up in the New World, in the course of the century and a half that witnessed the birth and growth to maturity largely through Irish American influence of the Republic of the United States (The Great Irish Fair (a) p. 1).

Kitty Murphy and the Nostalgia Narrative

Of course an exhibit like the map has the potential for a kind of nostalgic essentialism at its worst. The news coverage of the map exhibit maintained this romanticized narrative of personal reunion made public and provided vivid descriptions of the plaintive voice of emigrant longing. Of the thousands of people who walked across that map, only one was described in detail. The *Irish World*, serving an exclusively Irish and Irish American readership, authored a narrative to the experience in an attempt to fix collective memory and reinforce the triangular relationship between country, sod and ethos.

... One poor woman—Kate Murphy by name, and 80 years old—knelt down and kissed the soil of Fermanagh; then, crossing herself, proceeded to say her prayers, unmindful of the crowd around her. While thus kneeling a photographer took a flashlight picture of her. The flash was a revelation to the simple hearted creature, who seemed to think it a light from heaven, and was awed into reverential silence. When she finally stepped off the Irish soil she sighed sadly and clung to the fence, still gazing at “Old Ireland.” She kept looking backward as she walked away, as if bidding a long farewell (At the Irish Fair (d) p. 6-7).

The writer ends the evocative description by quoting the poem “The Exile of Erin” by Thomas Campbell (1777-1844), ascribing the plaintive voice of the speaker to the octogenarian Murphy:

“Erin, farewell! Though sad and forsaken/In dreams I revisit they seabeaten shore/But, alas! In a far, foreign land I awaken/And sigh for the friends who can meet me no more.” I did not witness this scene, but Mr. Luellon R. Paige, a staff writer on the *New York Journal*, who was in charge of the *Journal* exhibit on Saturday told me about it, and said that he could hardly keep back his tears as he saw the old woman’s sacred delight and the pathos of her last farewell (At the Irish Fair (d) p. 7).

The *New York Herald* gives a similar, if less cloying account:

“One of the most popular features of the show continues to be the floor map of Ireland, which is laid out with soil from every county of the Emerald Isle. Mrs. Kitty Murphy, an octogenarian who lives in Washington square, was born in the county of Fermanagh. When she entered the Fair she made haste to go to her old county. The old woman stood for a moment on the soil and lifted up her face in devotion. Then she sank on her knees and began to pray. At the time the Fair was filled with visitors and the spectacle of the old woman praying was interesting and affecting. Mrs. Murphy allowed nothing to escape her. She touched the “wishing cross” of Glen-da-Lough, sat in the St. Kevin’s “wishing chair,” gazed fondly on the treaty stone of Limerick and kissed the Blarney stone at least half a dozen times (Indians attend Irish Fair p. 18).

The Catholic Weekly Union provided its own description of another elderly woman, not named, but sufficiently similar to Katherine Murphy to suggest a theme:

An old lady...made a trip to little Ireland on Monday night and when she came to [her county] she gave a cry of delight, exclaiming “Hurrah! Hurrah! Thank the Lord. I’m on my native soil at last” (The Big Irish Fair p. 1).

Katherine Murphy, one woman out of thousands, was chosen as the most appropriate representation of what the Irish readership expected or wanted to see standing on that map. And in the case of the *New York Herald*, she was apparently followed around the hall as she enacted pathetic scenes of reunion at various relics or markers of Catholic Irish identity. Despite the mention of the photographer, none of the New York newspapers published a photograph of her

or anyone else on the map. It is natural to ask why multiple newspapers documented the same person, of the hundreds who would have stood on the map exhibit that day. What purpose was this description intended to serve? Is it accurate? Did Katherine Murphy willingly commodify herself, or was she merely considered an appropriate signifier for a particularly effective brand of Irishness? And if so, why?

Three thousand miles removed from Ireland, the soil itself (duly attested as truly genuine) becomes commodified culture, available at ten cents a turn. Katherine Murphy is read as “Kitty,” a symbol of the quaintly pre-industrialized, agrarian past, surrounded and overwhelmed by the mediatized, urban present. “Kitty” clearly then ticked a number of boxes regarding nineteenth century Irish-American expectations of Irish personality, religion and intellectual humility, at least as represented by contemporary journalists. Fintan O’Toole writes in *The Ex-Isle of Erin* that, “the very stuff of the land had become, not less but more tangible, not more abstract but more real. The soil trodden so many millions of times had acquired, because of its manner of presentation, the awesome magic of authenticity” (1997: 130). Regarding the veracity of the soil’s origins, the *Irish World* took pains to explain the process:

Thomas McVeigh Jr. went to Ireland as the *New York Journal* commissioner and representative of the United Irish Societies of New York and personally conducted the gathering and shipping of its component parts, bringing affidavits of distinguished mayors and officials that everything is genuine and exactly what it purports to be. Think of the months of labor on Mr. McVeigh’s part to perfect it all and the great expense to the Journal, but then think, too of its grand success! Surely Mr. W.R. Hurst, the publisher of the *Journal* and his representatives will say: “It pays for all to see the joy it gives the visitors to the fair and the great increase daily to the building fund” (At the Irish Fair (d) p. 7).

Poststructuralist theory helps us understand the strange, haunting quality of the event semiotically, or through what Mukarovsky calls the semantic gesture.¹² While one cannot know with any certainty the intent, execution and reception of any performative event—theatrical, cultural or otherwise, it is useful to remember Foucault’s assertion that there are places which are something like counter sites—a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which...all the other sites are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted (Foucault 1986: 24). This liminal efficacy is dependent on a porous distinction between the special and the ordinary. The map exhibit is first presented and described as a sacred space or pilgrimage site. It is bordered and demarcated, with a threshold through which one must enter, the omniscient shamrock overhead, and perhaps

most importantly, is viewable on all sides. No paper documents the presence of a crucifix or religious ornament on or near the map, save the *Catholic Weekly Union's* reference to "hav[ing] a wish to make and a cross to kiss," (The Irish Fair (b) p. 1) though it is not specified if the cross was part of the exhibit or referred to the spectator's rosary beads. The mythic relics (both actual and reproduced) of Parnell's grave, the "wishing chair," and the Blarney Stone serve to reinforce the actuality of the soil. The map exhibit coordinates and situates then the ideal and the real, providing a context that presents a useful version of the trope of the lost or ephemeral land, the sacred space. As the pilgrimage depends on the holy nature of the site and the potential for something out of the ordinary to occur within its bounds, the narrative of Katherine Murphy, and thousands of others that were arguably collapsed into a generic signifier of penitent Irish exile, served this aim. This valuation of a constructed Catholic, agrarian, antiquated homeland, embodied and signified by persons such as Murphy, serves to mark Ireland as apart from America, but also renders the Irish emigrant as sufficiently non-threatening to the largely Anglophilic, urban New York. Ireland and the Irish emigrant are thus, singularly and as a population, contained by the space of Grand Central, the larger city of New York, and the temporal constraints of the fair. Though the *Irish American* reported that the fair was extended to run into the first half of June (Our Irish Fair (a): p.1), the efficacy of the map exhibit is measured against the very temporary nature of the fair itself. To put it another way, the map affords reunions, and the repeated visual trope of Irish nationalism, only for as long as Grand Central Palace is rented for the occasion.

Thomas Brown has argued that this kind of Irish-American nationalism, whereby a hierarchical relationship exists between Ireland and America, emerged in the later second half of the nineteenth century and became a means by which upwardly mobile emigrants and their American-born children achieved status and acceptance. The growth of temperance societies, county organizations and labor unions in the middle of the nineteenth century, originally formed to ease the transition to American life, facilitated the upward progression of the Irish emigrant. The first county organization, the Sligo Young Men's Association, was formed Sept 1849 (1966: 277). *The Irish American* (February 3, 1850) wrote of the rehabilitative effect such organizations had on the perception of the Irish immigrant in New York:

We are gratified, truly, to see the organization of these associations. They give a becoming reply to the calumnious statement that our position in America was one of "poverty and shame." They show that it is (Thank God) far otherwise with those of our

people who are industrious, thrifty and well conducted. We are willing to admit that the idle and conceited Irish half sir, and the muddling intemperate, have nothing to expect but poverty and shame; and if our name be a reproach in this region of dignified labor and active enterprise, we have such as they alone to blame for it (Ridge 1996: 277).

However, as scholars have pointed out, although Irish Americans had reasons for optimism in 1897, there also were causes for concern. The transition to respectability and social success was neither easy nor smooth, and the construction of the Irish as emotionally tied to a distant home and not necessarily the United States was challenging. While the map exhibit's overtures to the "auld sod" were romantic, the meticulously staged exhibit, with its organized immigrant devotion to Ireland, could also be used to affirm the nativist accusations that Irish Americans were less than fully loyal to the United States. More broadly, the interpretation of emigration as forced exile, implying that the Irish were in America by compulsion rather than by choice, seemed to epitomize the group's ambiguous status among other immigrant groups. However much they had integrated and assimilated by 1897, Irish emigrants still experienced prejudice, and were often singled out by nativist organizations suspicious of their loyalty to the United States. The *New York Herald* quoted fair organizers, who, recognizing this, charged that the proposed Irish palace would have as its highest object, "the setting aside of prejudices that have put at enmity those who march under the orange and those whose emblem is green" (Irish Millennium p. 11). As Ryan Dye notes in his article "Irish-American Ambivalence toward the Spanish-American War," the American Protective Association, a powerful political force during the 1890s, attributed America's economic downturn to Catholics who sought to destroy the economic system in order to clear the way for the Church of Rome to seize control of the United States (Dye 2013: 100). The APA openly argued that agents of Rome were flooding America with Catholic immigrants to steal jobs from American citizens. Their "Note of Warning" in 1879 marked Irish-Catholic progress in America with a sobering castigation, cautioning that:

Owing to their faithful devotion to the Roman Catholic authority and the vigilant care of the Church to keep them in a state of obedience, they have failed to fuse into the mass of citizenship. They stand as distinctly defined in the body politic as though they were separated from the rest of the nation within actual territorial limits. It is equally true that the Romish church, whose authority over them is stronger than that of any secular authority, is hostile to free institutions... While this is true, are we really in danger from Romanism and the multiplication of the race in our population which is its obedient instrument? (Miller 2008: 249-257).

While Catholicism remained a central marker of Irish identity demonstrated at the Irish Fair,

Dye's argument goes some way towards explaining much of the pointed political critique during the speeches at the fair that opened each night's festivities. Chauncey M. Depew used his address at the podium to publicly support revolutionary efforts in Cuba and Greece and condemn perceived European passivity to their struggle. Cuban liberation from Spain was seen by many as a stepping stone to Ireland's liberation from Britain, and was also an opportunity to demonstrate unwavering support for America's political interests. Because nativists assumed that Irish American Catholics were more loyal to their pope than to their president, they concluded that Irish American support for Cuba was lukewarm at best, and at worst, that Irish Americans would actively undermine American political interests. Fair organizers worked aggressively to discount any questions about their American patriotism, all the while celebrating Ireland. Depew was extensively quoted by the *New York Herald*:

In this free land, every one may speak out for liberty and love of the Cross. Here you may make sacrifices for Christ. In every other so-called Christian land the spirit of Christianity is dead. There they sacrifice Christianity in the interest of the destinies of nations. Cuba is here by our side struggling for freedom: for the same rights for which you have fought and for which our forefathers fought. Our sympathy goes out to her but no nation in all Europe dare say a word on her behalf. Turkey cuts the throats of hundreds of thousands of Armenians, and puts hundreds of thousands of children to the bayonet, and all Christendom should cry out. But it does not. We'd like to do it if we were only let! American sympathy is with Greece and Cuba and Armenia. What is going on now is a triumph of savagery over the Christianity of the 19th century. Thank God we in America sympathize with the Greeks. If we were nearer we would give her more sympathy (Great Crowd at the Irish Fair p.7).

Except for a few of the most ardent revolutionaries, Irish-American nationalist spokesmen like Depew generally made tortuous efforts to reconcile Irish and American patriotism and to reassure the American middle class—as well as hesitant middle-class Irish Americans (and Catholic clergy)—that Irish-American nationalism was fully compatible with aspirations toward assimilation and respectability.

Depew assured the American public that “President McKinley will have no more loyal and patriotic supporters in any position he may take in vindicating the honor and dignity of our country, than among members of the Church” (The Irish Fair (a) p. 6). But while fair organizers and Irish American newspapers demonstrated their support to Cuba's revolutionary efforts, and would later support America in the Spanish American War of 1898, their status as McKinley's most “loyal and patriotic supporters” was not applicable to a significant piece of proposed

legislation, the Arbitration Treaty of 1897.

As the Irish Fair had as its aim the celebration of Irish history and culture, with a special night reserved for the commemoration of the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion, many believed that the real enemy to Irish interests was Britain. Irish Americans touted their patriotic support for America's war aims, while vigorously condemning any special relationship between the United States and Britain. The debates surrounding the Arbitration Treaty, occurring nearly simultaneously with the fair and covered extensively by Irish American newspapers, adds another layer of meaning to this deceptively simple exhibit.

The Arbitration Treaty

The Arbitration Treaty, otherwise known as the Olney-Pauncefote Treaty, was the result of the early efforts of Randal Cremer, Member of Parliament and organizer of the Peace Society of Working Men, who secured two hundred and thirty four signatures for a memorial in favor of an Anglo-American general arbitration treaty. A delegation headed by Cremer and Lord Playfair brought the memorial to America and presented it to then President Grover Cleveland. Congress debated the proposed treaty in 1890 and a resolution was passed unanimously, requesting the President to invite negotiations for a general arbitration treaty with any government with which the United States had diplomatic relations. While prospects were originally bright, with early resolutions passing unanimously in Congress and the House of Commons, they soon dimmed with the combined effects of the Venezuelan boundary dispute, and the lobbying efforts of Irish American newspapers and groups. The Olney-Pauncefote Treaty was finally signed on January 11, 1897, with McKinley now in office, and represented a victory for the American contention that a general arbitration agreement should cover all types of controversies and should provide a final decision in most cases.¹³ It would move to Congress for a vote.

Opposition to the treaty centered around reluctance to have "foreign influence" in North and South America, and questions about how obligatory arbitration might affect any particular interest of the United States. Still, McKinley actively supported the treaty and pushed for its ratification. Many in Congress openly opposed the treaty and the Foreign Relations Committee amended the bill, requiring the consent of two thirds of the Senate necessary for the submission of any dispute to arbitration, thus stripping it of any significance.

But it was the lobbying efforts of Irish Americans that were particularly effective in the

treaty's failure. More petitions and memorials regarding Olney Pauncefote were sent to senators than on any preceding treaty, with at least twenty three of the thirty six petitions opposing ratification were from Irish-American organizations. Irish American newspapers were united in their opposition. "A Catspaw for England," read the January twenty-third headline for the *Irish World*, asking "Are we raking British chestnuts out of the European fire?" (A Catspaw for England p. 1). The newspapers were particularly effective in labeling the project an alliance and boldly appealed to the American prejudice against involvements abroad, and to Irish interests that would oppose any treaty that favored British political interests. On May 5, 1897, the day of the final vote on the treaty, two prominent Irish nationalists were in the Senate lobby working hard to insure its defeat. One was Patrick Egan, prominent republican and former American minister to Chile, and Michael Davitt, the founder of the Irish Land League and one of the most prominent members of the Irish Nationalist party in the British parliament. Davitt had timed one of his frequent visits to the United States so as to take part in this particular debate. He wanted, he said, to demonstrate to the English that their hope for closer relations with the United States would be forever thwarted unless they satisfied the Irish aspiration for self-government (Michael Davitt Here (a) p. 1).

On May 5, 1897, the debates came to an end and the treaty was defeated, with forty three Senators voting yes and twenty six opposed, three less than the constitutional two-thirds of the Senators present required for ratification. Nelson Blake writes, in his essay "The Olney-Pauncefote Treaty of 1897", that "it need not be doubted that Irish-American lobbying had been effective" (1945: 240). The *Irish World* gave their reasons for the treaty's failure as well, adding "...numerous reasons have been given for the rejection of the treaty, but there can be no doubt, from what was said in the debate and in conversation by Senators that THE DOMINANT CAUSE WAS A COMBINATION OF HATRED AND DISTRUST OF ENGLAND" (The treaty rejected p. 1; capitals in original). Michael Davitt was asked to remark on the vote and his role in lobbying against it:

I am glad that the treaty was rejected by the Senate... A ratification of the treaty, no matter how much it had been modified, would have created the impression throughout continental Europe that this Republic, with its Irish, German, French and other races had morally endorsed England's un-Christian foreign policy...there are some Senators with Irish blood in their veins who were quick to strike a blow against the enemy of Irish liberty by voting against this treaty (The Treaty Rejected p. 1).

In an article in the *New York World*, reprinted in the May 15th issue of the *Irish World*, “What Killed the English Treaty?,” the first reason listed is the “Hibernian influence exercised an indirect but not ineffective opposition” (p. 1). The newspaper went on to print drawings of each of the twenty six senators who voted against the treaty, referring to it as “The Roll of Honor.” In the same issue, a letter from the editor reads:

...as an Irishman who closely watched every movement that took place in this country for some months back to battle treaty-making and treaty-breaking England in her nefarious Olney-Pauncefote plot to inveigle the United States into becoming a British dependency... I most heartily congratulate the *Irish World* on its splendid work in so eloquently and constantly keeping before the public the reasons why such a treaty should be ignominiously knocked out, for which it deserves and should have the grateful thanks of every loyal American.

Mr. Davitt, the well-known Irish patriot and Member of Parliament, was fortunately in Washington for several days on his return from California, and deserves all honour from his kith and kin all over the globe for his noble work in taking so active a part in helping to defend the machinations of our Anglomaniac friends. Mr. Davitt worked night and day, interviewing Senators and convincing them in his own eloquent way how futile it would be to enter into a treaty with a country that is at the present time laying out millions of pounds sterling in building fortresses all round our frontiers—but quite so characteristic and “English, you know.” To use Mr. Gladstone’s well-known words, “Ireland still blocks the way and may she ever do so, and continue to be a thorn in the side of England until she becomes, for all time, “A nation once again” (Ireland Still Blocks the Way p. 1).

The *Irish American* echoed the sentiments expressed by the *Irish World*, adding, “The flagrant violation of diplomatic etiquette on this occasion is but another example of the open contempt which escapes from baffled John Bull when he fails to decoy or force the United States into his service”(The Great Irish Fair (b) p. 5).

Looking to the Future

As the map exhibit at the Irish Fair of 1897 situated the sod as sacred, it is perhaps not surprising that some fair participants requested samples of it for themselves or loved ones who would never again return to the old country. The *New York Times* reported on May 22, 1897 that Daniel F. McGee, ninety-six; his wife, Bridget, eighty-nine, and their son, Michael, sixty-nine years old, visited the fair and made such a request. “The old couple asked for some soil from the Dublin booth, to send to a sick son in South America. Their request was granted, and they left all

smiles and happiness” (At the Irish Fair p. 7). While the map exhibit was the most profitable exhibit at the fair, this writer finds it curious that the soil, “duly attested as truly genuine”, was not for sale. Arguably, such a commercial venture would have diluted the transformative power ascribed to the soil by the exhibit, even though it would have arguably been a successful money maker for the association. As much as Ireland could be recreated in Grand Central Palace, the soil could not find its way into every home across the boroughs of New York. Such a venture would have to wait until the twenty first century.

In November of 2006, [officialirishdirt.com](http://www.officialirishdirt.com) began selling one pound bags of authentic Irish soil for fifteen dollars over the internet. Straight from the Auld Sod Export Company in county Tipperary, the company began selling dirt to the Irish diaspora, capitalizing on the sentimental symbolism Irish soil has had for generations of Irish Americans. Pat Burke, co-founder of the company, explained that the soil would be tossed on top of coffins or sprinkled on grass over grave sites. According to the website, funeral directors and florists have ordered pounds of it, as have wholesalers in China, who explained that their customers were attracted by the legend of Irish luck (<http://www.officialirishdirt.com>). While the business venture initially may have appeared unlikely to succeed, the first six months yielded over two million dollars in sales in North America alone, including an eighty-seven year old lawyer in Manhattan originally from Galway who purchased \$100,000 worth of the dirt to fill in his yet to be dug American grave. Another emigrant, native to County Cork, spent \$148,000 on seven tons to spread under the house he was having built in the United States. “He said he wanted a house built on Irish soil so he can feel like he is home in old Ireland when he walked around his house in Massachusetts,” ([officialirishdirt.com](http://www.officialirishdirt.com)) Burke said. In addition to the soil, customers can also purchase a shamrock



Figure 6. Can of “official Irish dirt”.
<http://www.officialirishdirt.com>

growing kit and a “Forever Irish” funeral canister, used to sprinkle Irish soil on the casket of the recently departed. The description of the products on the website reads:

Irish people, and those of Irish descent, have a profound connection to this ritual. Not only is it about accepting the death of a loved one. For the Irish, it’s also about returning to the land and, in the case of the Irish abroad, re-establishing a connection with the land of their birth, or the home of their ancestors. There is an importance and influence of mother earth, and where we came from in forming who we are. In some cases where we would like to be—be it in this life or the next. (“officialirishdirt.com”).

Nostalgia, whether for a land one has left years ago, or for the idea of a homeland one has never been to, is often denigrated as a preference for the unreal over the real and, by extension, a denial of complexity and difference. Operating in the gap between what is known and what is imagined, nostalgia has the potential to transform the future even though it can never restore the past. The 1897 Irish Fair map exhibit used a walk across sod to performatively remember, and to re-imagine the future, where evicted farmers, Famine survivors, upwardly mobile Irish immigrants, Irish Americans, and the economically disenfranchised were aligned in a narrative of sorrowful exile, however varied their present economic positions might have been.

All maps, like the one they were standing on at the fair, are systems of knowledge and legal authority; exercises in the power of dividing, naming and containing not just a territory, but a government, a people, a culture. Borders are then by their very nature contentious, and maps are the physical or visual representation of politically designated physical boundaries. Given the charged history that mapping has had in Ireland—specifically the nineteenth century Ordnance survey in which Irish territories were linguistically as well as politically occupied and the centuries’ long struggle for Irish independence, it is tempting to read the 1897 map exhibit as authoring a narrative of Ireland’s static occupation. However I maintain that the map spoke more to Ireland’s history of physical and cultural mobility. It created a unique opportunity to liminally present or re-present the Irish diaspora as locatable *communitas*. This creates what Irit Rogoff calls “zones [of] disidentification,” spaces in which fluid and multiple identities circulate (2000: 120). If, as Fintan O’Toole asserts in his essay “Perpetual Motion,” “[t]o imagine Ireland is to imagine a journey” (1997: 77), I argue that the map exhibit stages particular displays of cultural hybridity, the transformative power of feet on soil that affords private reunion in public display. This locates the Irish man or woman as both apart from and a part of a shared terrain. If the concept of dispersion is central to the term diaspora, the 1897 map exhibit in many ways

privileged this very dispersion—locating the Irish participant in a metaphorical gulf between Ireland and America.

The coverage of the fair in general and of the map exhibit in particular exemplifies the contested positions the Irish have occupied throughout their history in New York. The Irish have been both victims and victimizers, “other” and definer of the “other,” and, paradoxically, sometimes have played both roles simultaneously. For twenty-first century academics, the 1897 Irish fair map exhibit is an interesting way to consider the contested cultural and political hybridity of the Irish in America in the late nineteenth century, and ultimately can be read as a contrapuntal discourse that was not just pointing towards an Irish past, but challenging the present and articulating a political future.

Endnotes

I am grateful to the American Irish Historical Society, particularly archivist William Hurley for access to their archives of nineteenth century Irish newspapers, as well as their logbooks, programs, and correspondence relating to Irish fraternal organizations, and the Irish Palace Building organization.

¹ There were a series of themed nights at the fair. Robert Emmet's memory was commemorated on May 12th by the Clan-na-Gael, who, headed by the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of their several camps, with R.J. Kennedy as Grand Marshal, marched to the Palace Building, under the escort of Company E. of the Volunteers. "On their arrival at the Palace a very fine programme of exercises was gone through. . . May 20th was '98 Night," and the descendants of the men who fought in the memorable Wexford "rising" turned out in full force to do honor to the anniversary of one of the most famous battles in Irish history. The '98 Centennial Association, the County Cork Men's Association, the United Irish Counties Association, and other organizations, under Grand Marshal O'Beirne, escorted by the First Regiment, Irish Volunteers, paraded from the Barrett House to the Palace. The calls for "rebel" Cork and "98" were heard all along the line. At the meeting in the hall, Judge Martin J. Keogh presided. He paid a glowing tribute to the brave men who died showing their loyalty in the "rising," and said that "1898" should see another "rising," at Cork, to show our English cousins that our proud spirit still lives. Judge Morgan J. O'Brien aroused the audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm by his eloquent address on the "Heroes of 98," taking as his text the shibboleth "Who Fears to Speak of 98." Edward O'Mahony and John Sheehan sang from the turret of Blarney Castle, accompanied by the trumpeters of the Volunteers. Friday night, Andrew Mack, the sweet Irish singer, delighted the audience that gathered around 'Little Ireland' with a varied selection of Irish Music. He shared the honors of the evening with Young Herman the Great, who performed a number of his famous tricks, and won the plaudits of his guests by catching bullets fired from the rifles of a company of Volunteers.

² The *Irish American* reported in their May 31, 1897 issue: "Last week the Executive Committee selected the Knickerbocker Trust Company as the depository for the funds of the Fair, and already the amount on deposit has reached a large figure." The county societies learned after the fair that they would have no share in the proceeds or in the future direction of the Irish Palace. The counties represented by Mayo, Kildare, Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Sligo sued, but the decision was made against them. See John T. Ridge's "Irish County Societies in New York: 1880-1914," in *The New York Irish* (1996).

³ A press release by the American Irish Historical Society, March 15, 19 (the date is not noted on the release and the AIHS archivist was not able to identify the exact date) gives specific information. "The dream began in the spring of 1897 when Anti-Irish prejudices are still running strong on mainstream America and when New York's burgeoning Irish community felt it needed a common meeting place to celebrate its identity and heritage. In this cause, twenty nine Irish organizations and the First Regiment formed the Irish Palace Association and sponsored a month long fair that raised the then impressive sum of \$35,539.

The original fund proved to be too modest to finance a building, even in those days, but the Association took a first step toward its goal by buying a quarter acre site at 85th and Lexington Ave. In the years that followed, it continued to raise money, but never enough at any one time to finance a building. Instead, it contributed to a variety of other Irish cultural activities.

Last year, the Association's Chairman, Charles T. Rice, 89, of Oyster Bay, Long Island, and his fellow trustees decided to dissolve the association. They arranged to distribute the remaining funds, around \$100,000—to several culturally active Irish organizations.

But it was the American Irish Historical Society, with its magnificent building at 991 5th Avenue, across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which most nearly matched the dream first dreamed nearly a century ago. It is, after all, the closest thing to an Irish Palace this side of Dublin Castle.

⁴ The first Sanitary Commission fair for the support of the Northern cause, held in 1863 in Chicago, netted between \$68,000 and \$100,000. A later Boston fair raised \$146,000, and the Philadelphia fair more than \$1 million dollars. The 1864 New York Metropolitan Fair raised \$2 million for the Northern cause. See Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (1992).

⁵ Significantly, fairs of the size of the Irish Fair were not without their share of risk. In addition to robbery, which was a common occurrence at gatherings of this size, the threat of crowds and fire were very real. On May 4, 1897, approximately one week before the Irish Fair opened, one hundred women perished and more than two hundred persons were injured in a fire at a charity bazaar in the Rue Jean Goujon in Paris (“Awful Fire in Paris Kills 100” p. 18).

⁶ The *New York Herald* documented his visit in their May 14, 1897 issue. “Then Rain-in-the-Face, in response to vociferous cheers, made a speech. He stood before the gates of Blarney Castle, threw his blanket around him like a toga, and spoke in the Indian tongue.” “The Indian chief,” said the interpreter, “says that he is glad to meet the Irish and to tread the old earth which has been brought from afar.” Here the audience burst into uproarious cheers. “He is glad,” continued the interpreter, “to meet the chief of fighters, who leads the people for whom nothing is too good, and he thinks that the men are strong and women are fair.” Thereupon a great cheer arose. “Rain-in-the-Face also says,” continued the interpreter, “that the Irish are a mighty tribe. The Indians, the forefathers of Rain-in-the-Face, once owned all the country. Now the Irish have come to rule around all the coasts and the Indian is driven into the interior. Rain-in-the-Face says that he has nothing more to say. Rain-in-the-Face thinks that he has said enough. He now says good night. Rain-in-the-Face and his followers were then escorted about the palace. They gave their war cry, and a few minutes later took their departure.”

⁷ There is a wide body of postcolonial scholarship on Ireland. See Eagleton 1990; Lloyd 1993, Kiberd 1995; Gibbons 2004; Lennon 2008.

⁸ The number of political minded Irish nationalists would increase exponentially after 1916. Kerby Miller writes that Irish Americans responded so vehemently to British suppression of the Easter rising that “between that date and 1921 some 800,000 joined nationalist organizations and remitted over \$10 million to support Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in their partly successful War of Independence” (2008: 267).

⁹ Chauncey Depew (1834-1928) was an attorney for Cornelius Vanderbilt’s railroad interests, president of the New York Central Railroad System, and served as a United States Senator from New York (1899-1911). He was a prominent supporter of the Irish Palace Building Association and delivered the opening night address for the Irish Fair.

¹⁰ Instituted in 1784 to assist the “poor and distressed natives of Ireland,” the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick is the oldest American Irish organization in the United States. Although other localities had branches of the Friendly Sons, the New York City group was the oldest and appeared to be the most prominent. For more information, consult *The History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in the City of New York*, by Richard C. Murphy and Lawrence Mannion (New York: J.C. Dillon Co., Inc., 1962).

¹¹ The program books for the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick annual dinner are kept in the archives of the American Irish Historical Society (AIHS). The 1894 program book for the Annual Dinner can be found in Box 15 of the AIHS. This quote is from page 27 of the program, no publisher listed.

¹² In a series of articles, written during the last years of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, Jan Mukarovsky gradually introduced into literary theory his concept of 'semantic gesture'. His ideas on semantic context and semantic gestures are most clearly developed in *The Genesis of Meaning in Macha's Poetry* (Mukarovsky 1938). For an introduction to Mukarovsky's writings on semantic gesture, see: Kees Mercks, "Introductory observations on the concept of 'semantic gesture'," *Amsterdam International Electronic Journal for Cultural Narratology* 3 (Autumn 2006): n.p. Accessed on the web 10 July 2013.

¹³ Pecuniary claims not exceeding one hundred thousand pounds were to be subject to the final decision of a tribunal composed of one arbitrator from each country and an umpire chosen by the two; all larger claims and other matters except territorial claims were to be submitted to such a tribunal of three, but unless the decision of this tribunal were unanimous an appeal might be taken up to a second tribunal of five, two from each country plus an umpire chosen by the four; territorial claims were reserved for a tribunal of six members, three from each party with no umpire, and were not to be final unless agreed to by at least five of the arbiters; in cases where there was disagreement over the choice of an umpire he was to be named by the King of Sweden (Miller 2008: 234).

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