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# New York Irish History

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Vol. 8, 1993-94



**Journal of the New York Irish History Roundtable**

# War And Recruitment-- Peasants As Patriots

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The Civil War experience made the New York Irish Brigade recruits and their families (who received the Civil War Pension) Americans. In a slow process between 1850 and 1890, various institutions helped to bond immigrant Irish Catholic peasants to New York, then to the United States.

The workplace was the first institution connecting these Irish to the city, state, and nation. Builders of the New York State and eastern seaboard transportation network, the Irish transformed the infrastructure and were, in turn, transformed by it. They had a niche in their adopted homeland—however onerous and oppressive the work was at the bottom of the social scale. Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party connected them to local and national political institutions. This second place of refuge provided needed social services, political education, and the vote. The Roman Catholic Church then coddled the Irish by its parish church organization in New York City, its establishment of parochial schools, and its founding of social service agencies for the needy. When war came, Irish and American flags flew from every New York City Catholic Church. Irish Brigade (the 63rd, 69th, and 88th Regiments of New York Infantry soon joined with the 28th Massachusetts and the 116th Pennsylvania) recruiting officers schooled prospective recruits in covenanted patriotism, which John Schaar described in *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1981) as a process started in America by the Puritans. Only upon the acceptance of certain articles of religious faith and morals did individuals become members of the community. The guardians of the covenant needed to be satisfied that individuals' acceptance had been proved in practice. The purpose of social institutions was to encourage performance of the covenant. The *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States* were the covenant; responsibility to defend them in a war for the Union, the arc of the covenant. High Irish Brigade casualties sustained by these brave warriors created a sense of entitlement to be Americans, regardless of what nativists said. Receipt of the Civil War pension ended the long assimilation process as the Pension Bureau's red tape glued the soldiers and their families to the social structure. The Irish had become Americans.

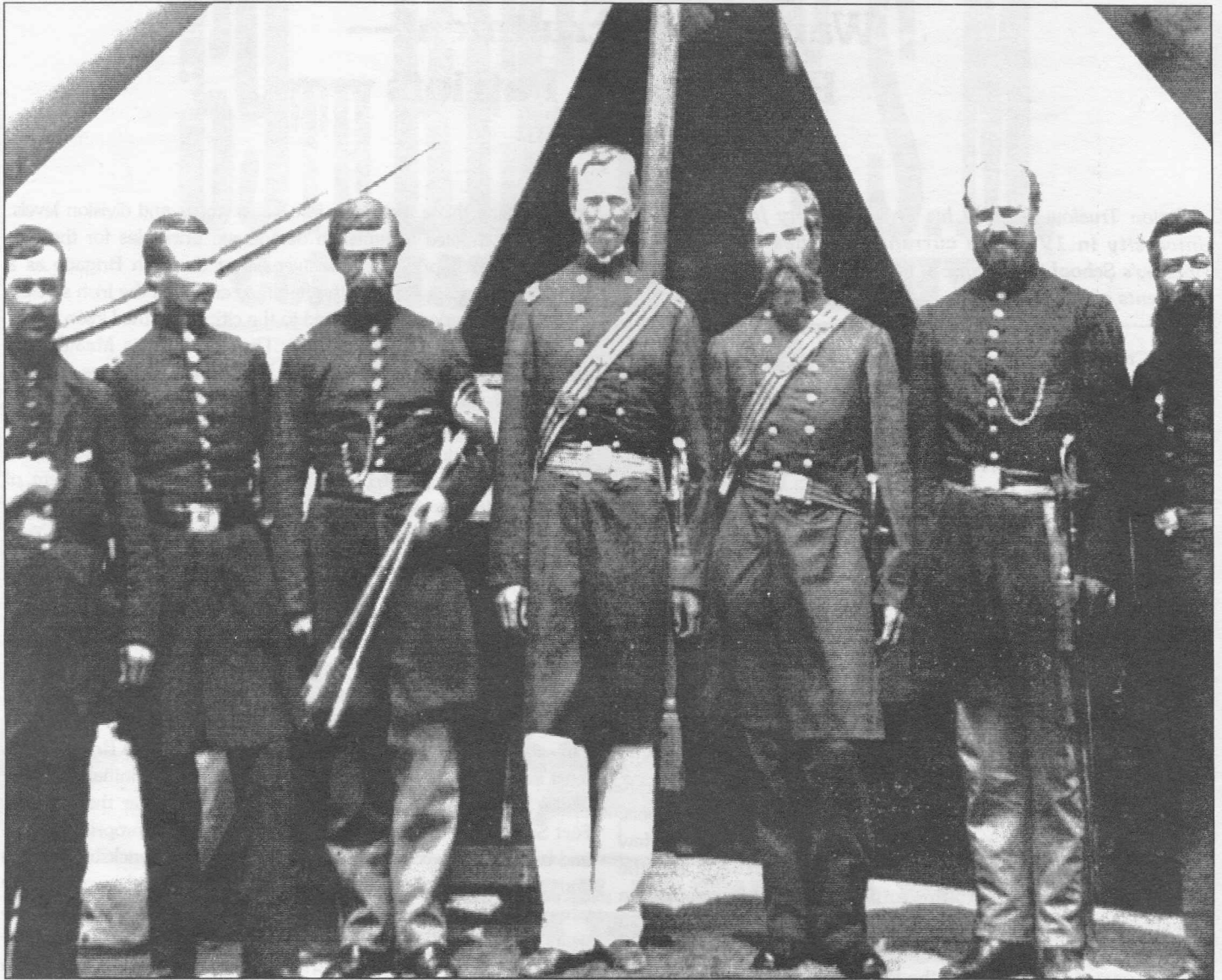
In this, the second chapter of a doctoral thesis entitled *Peasants Into Patriots: The New York Irish Brigade Recruits and Their Families in the Civil War Era, 1850–1890*, the Union Army continued the process of assimilation by recruiting ethnic regiments,

intermingling those regiments into larger corps and division levels. Recruiters schooled Irishmen in democratic principles for the solidarity of the Union. The effectiveness of the Irish Brigade as a fighting force in the Army of the Potomac endeared the Irish soldiers to its Anglo-American leaders and to the citizens of the Union.

On Friday, October 25, 1861, Thomas Francis Meagher of Waterford, Ireland, reviewed his Irish Brigade troops at Fort Schuyler on Throg's Neck, New York. During the next week his men would be paraded to the music of Dodsworth's band and invaded by hundreds of visitors from Manhattan. Evacuated to the front in the Fall of 1861, the Irish Brigade's<sup>1</sup> 69th Regiment of New York Infantry was joined in December of 1861 at Camp California, Virginia, by the 88th and 63rd Regiments of New York Infantry.<sup>2</sup> Training and drilling proceeded under the command of Colonel Robert Nugent until replaced as Brigade Commander in February of 1862 by Meagher. Held out of action at the Second Battle of Bull Run on August 30, 1862, as a supporting unit in the Army of the Potomac, the Brigade eventually sailed up the York River where its baptism of fire occurred with the Siege of Yorktown, April to May, 1862.

In order to tell the military history story of the Irish Brigade, one must answer several questions. First, what was the initial response of the New York Irish to the call for volunteers after the firing on Fort Sumter in April, 1861? Secondly, with the appropriate events and battles (such as Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg) along with the culture of the Brigade in the background narrative, by whom and how were Irish Brigade units recruited in the first two years of the war? Even though this is a dissertation about peasants, not leaders, answering this question necessarily involves a brief biographical sketch of the Brigade's leadership (the recruiters).<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, what is the recruitment story like for the Brigade after Fredericksburg (December 13, 1852), and up to the resignation from the Brigade in May 1863 by Thomas F. Meagher? My contention is that the initial popular enthusiasm of the New York Irish immediately after war started was sustained and fueled by skilled charismatic Irish leaders and speakers (like Meagher) who relied on set themes (Irish nationalism, natural Irish fighting ability, support of the *Constitution*, democracy, and the Union, and acceptance into American society) to recruit the Irish. The nature of enrollment changes with the departure of Meagher after the Chancellorsville campaign in the spring, and enactment of the draft in the summer of 1863. How the draft riots fit into the peasants as patriot's theme is a question answered in Chapter III.

This essay demonstrates that the 63rd, 69th, and 88th regiments of New York infantry enlisted primarily for patriotic reasons. Chapter III of the dissertation deals with the underlying reasons for enlistment in addition to patriotism including monetary incentives



Col. Michael Corcoran & Staff 69th Regt., N.Y.S.M. Photo Courtesy of US Army Military History Institute.

from bounties and from substitution. They were, however, no doubt happy to receive pay from the Federal bounty system launched in May, 1861, and supplemented by New York State Bounty in July, 1862. But they did not count on inefficient state and federal bureaucracies paying them.<sup>4</sup> As the horrors of the war became more widely known—especially after Fredericksburg—recruiting became difficult, so Lincoln started the Civil War Draft in 1863. The New York City draft riots of that summer show that a small percentage of Irish formed as mobs; they had let themselves “be led by politicians into the draft riots” and “brought down on the heads of their fellow nationals extensive criticism and unpopularity in the city.” The Irish Brigade, though, and their families who supported them “had written a proud chapter of sacrifice and patriotic loyalty to their new nation...the bulk of the Irish population had an unshakable loyalty to the Union and while they might

follow politicians in a carping policy against the administration, they remained true to the United States throughout the war.”<sup>4A</sup> And a very recent scholarly study of the ethnic regiments has found that “from the beginning there was no doubt about the courage, devotion, and willingness to die for the Union on the part of the Irish soldiers.”<sup>4B</sup>

The initial response of the New York Irish to the call for volunteers after outbreak of hostilities came when Colonel Michael Corcoran offered the services of the 69th regiment of the New York State Militia—a previously organized all-Irish unit (yet not a part of the Irish Brigade which was formed after First Bull Run).<sup>5</sup> *The Irish American* reported on April 27, 1861, that the 69th could not take but half of the troops who volunteered. The most popular New York City Irish paper reported several other proofs of Irish loyalty, enthusiasm and patriotism. First, that Thomas Francis

Meagher, like the overwhelming majority of his countrymen, stood fast by the Union, for which he was prepared to fight, if necessary, die. Secondly, "Young Irishmen to arms! To arms! Young Irishmen!! Irish Zouaves!!" read the headlines. The text continued: "One hundred young Irishmen—healthy—intelligent and active—wanted at once to form a company under command of Thomas Francis Meagher to be attached to the 69th regiment, N.Y.S.M. No appli-



Capt. Thomas F. Meagher, Co. K., 69th Regt. N.Y.S.M. Vol. Inf.  
Photo Courtesy US Army Military History Institute

cant under eighteen or above thirty-five years of age will be enrolled in the company. Applications to be made at 36 Beekman Street every day, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5 p.m." Thirdly, *The Irish American* noted that thousands of Irish Americans had attended the April 20, 1861 "monster meeting" at Union Square in support of the Union. There, "every hotel and private building in it was literally draped in American flags..." And opposite George Washington's statue was the main speaker stand on which the officers from Fort Sumter stood—including Major Anderson. "The glorious flag of Fort Sumter...was placed in the

brazen hand of Washington's statue by Officer Hart, the New York City [Irish] policeman who escorted Mrs. Anderson to Charleston."<sup>6</sup>

Enthusiasm resulted in the City of New York becoming a city of military camps. Twenty-five hundred volunteers, many of them Irish, pitched tents behind the sea wall and the Battery. In City Hall Park, wooden barracks were constructed. Near Washington's statue in Union Square a large tent went up while other housing appeared in Central Park.<sup>6A</sup>

Perhaps the richest portrait of Irish enthusiasm and incipient patriotism is painted by *The Irish American* in its edition for May 4, 1861. Article headlines read "Departure of the 69th regiment" and "enthusiasm of the people." On Tuesday of the previous week, throngs jammed lower Broadway "to bid the gallant fellows God-speed on their way" and everybody concerned felt that "never previously had there been anything like the spirit and enthusiasm of the population on this occasion." Marching to the quarters of Colonel Corcoran on Prince Street for supplies, the 69th then proceeded to Great Jones Street where the regiment was presented "with a splendid silk United States flag, made expressly for them by the wife of Judge Daly. Colonel Corcoran received the splendid present...the flag was then placed beside the splendid 'green banner.'" At 3 p.m. the regiment moved to Pier No. 4 "amid deafening cheers from the immense multitude present." The crowd was so dense that a squad of police had to march ahead of the regiment to open a passage for the soldiers. *The Irish American* report then reached its crescendo: "At the head of the procession was a decorated wagon, drawn by four horses and bearing the inscription '69th, remember Fontenoy' and 'no North, no South, no East, no West, but the whole Union.'" Next came the "'Exile's Club' and the Phoenix Musketeers after whom marched about 500 citizens wearing national badges." After these came the "engineer corps of the regiment...next came Engine Company No. 33 (Black Joke), numbering 200 men; after whom turned out the 'Phoenix Zouaves,' who turned out to escort the 69th." Next came the members of the "Hibernia Hook and Ladder Company, No. 18, drawing a brass gun, from which they fired salutes all the way to the dock." After these came the "'Cecilion Band,' who discoursed a variety of patriotic and national airs. Then came a number of the friends of the 69th, with linked arms, marching in front of the regiment which was headed by 'Robertson's Band.'" The reporter noted that "it was...6 o'clock before the embarkation was completed." And, "the fleet reached Annapolis after a prosperous voyage; and at last accounts the 69th were guarding the road from Annapolis to the Washington Junction."<sup>7</sup> The description of this procession shows not only enthusiastic support by Irish people for the Union's war effort, but also captures prominent Irish political organizations (mentioned in Chapter I) on the march such as the Black Joke Engine Company. Immigrant Irish institutions now became bonding agents for recruits to become Americans as well as to be Irish. "The Irish can truly claim" remarked historian Florence Gibson, "to have been in the forefront of the first rush to the colors which followed the attack on Fort Sumter."<sup>8</sup>

How had recruiting appeals been formulated for the Irish at the outbreak of hostilities? Since this dissertation deals with the Irish Brigade primarily (which was not organized until the Fall of 1861)

and not the 69th regiment of the New York State Militia, we will only briefly point out the general pitch recruiters made in the Spring and Summer of 1861. "To a large extent, recruiting appeals to ethnics were exactly the same as those for all Americans."<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the level of government from which the appeal came, the arguments stressed that patriots should defend the threatened union. The special pitch by Irish recruiters in the Spring and Summer of 1861 embodied Irish cultural chauvinism and the Irish warrior class prowess, as Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson observed: "Celts shared certain warlike characteristics. They glorified war, seemed genuinely fond of combat, and usually fought with reckless bravery."<sup>10</sup> The reporter for *The Irish American* wrote, "That the fame of the gallant corps had preceded it. The eagerness of the men in volunteering for defence of their adopted country" not to mention "their patient endurance of hardship" and "privation on their route," and "the discipline and correct conduct of the regiment" had "won the people of Maryland and the District of Columbia that every tongue was loud in their praise." Even the Union commander General Scott was "impressed by the physique and morale of the 69th [and] is shown by his assigning them the post of honor (and of danger) in advance of the federal position."<sup>11</sup>

An adjunct to the Celtic valor theme was that of Irish nationalism which Corcoran and Meagher exploited early in the war. In a recruiting speech in Philadelphia, Corcoran reminded his audience that he had refused to parade his 69th N.Y.S.M. regiment to honor the Prince of Wales in 1860; that he was a Fenian, and that the Union army training would come in handy one day in the fight against England. "When this unhappy Civil War is at a close" said Corcoran, "and the Union restored, there will be tens of thousands of Ireland's noblest sons left to redeem their native land from the oppression of old England."<sup>12</sup> With recruiting pitches such as these, little wonder that "Corcoran turned away five volunteers for every one accepted in early 1861."<sup>13</sup> And when asked about the term of enlistment in a letter from Judge Daly of August 27, 1861, Corcoran apparently dictated a letter to the Judge which was in Meagher's handwriting, and written from headquarters of the 69th regiment, New York State Militia, Fort Corcoran, Arlington Heights, Virginia, and dated July 8, 1861. Both Meagher and Corcoran signed the letter. Corcoran did not know if the 69th would reenlist when their three months' term of service ended. He urged Judge Daly (and the Judge's influential friends) to stop making appeals to the Irish public of New York "on behalf of the families of the men of the 69th" and in the meantime Corcoran thanked Daly for his efforts. To help "the regiment, for your hearty devotion and activity in its behalf."<sup>13A</sup> And many in New York showed interest and excitement for the Irish Brigade. The correspondence is important because it shows the level of involvement with recruiting and the concern for the troops that Judge Daly had. That a respected New York public official and member of the establishment—an Irishman himself—was active further connected the Irish Brigade to the state and legitimacy. On the eve of the first great battle of the war, this connection was crucial.

One week before defeat at the first Battle of Manassas, in July of 1861, the chaplain of the 69th regiment of N.Y.S.M. had returned home to St. Bridget's Church on Tompkin's Square. Appointed by

Archbishop Hughes as the 68th's chaplain, T.J. Mooney, on leave from the regiment, approached the church and was greeted by 1,400 children plus thousands of parishioners. "The stars and stripes and the green flag of Ireland were displayed from the tower of the church where their appearance in union elicited rapturous applause."<sup>14</sup>

Even after the Union defeat at First Bull Run and the rebel capture of Corcoran, and imprisonment until his release in August 1862, he became a national hero. Recruiters "exploited his fame and that of the 'gallant-sixty-ninth' to encourage young Irishmen to enlist in Irish regiments."<sup>15</sup> Freed in August of 1862, and promoted to Brigadier General by Lincoln upon the urging of Archbishop Hughes, "his picture graced the cover of *Harper's*, and he made a triumphant procession to several northern cities in each of which he gave patriotic addresses and urged the Irish-American community to support the war."<sup>16</sup> Forming Corcoran's legion after his release from prison, General Michael Corcoran died from an alcohol-related accident—falling off Meagher's horse—on December 22, 1863.

Charismatic leaders continued to be invaluable in the recruiting effort for the Irish Brigade early in the war; Meagher and his staff were very effective. Emphasizing familiar themes used earlier of Irish nationalism and hatred of England as well as using the war for the political advantage of the Irish, Meagher was the model recruiter in the Northeast. As a prominent citizen, Meagher was the type most often sought after by governors and federal politicians (or vice-versa in Meagher's case) to recruit and organize regiments. They were usually given the rank of colonel by the governor in the state militia. In turn, this colonel asked his friends to help him recruit as well, and usually such friends were made captains. For example, Meagher contacted his friend Sergeant Thomas O'Neill to help recruit for the Brigade. O'Neill was made acting major in charge of the recruiting station at 42 Prince Street, and this building was named Hibernia Hall.<sup>17</sup> Recruiting officers had their work cut out for themselves because a Civil War regiment typically had ten companies of one hundred men each. "Mass meetings were a standard feature of recruiting efforts. Here leading citizens joined prospective officers in regaling audiences with oratorical outbursts full of allusions to country and flag and breathing defiance at slaveholders and traitors."<sup>18</sup> The North, after all, had "Meagher of the sword," a kind of secret oratorical weapon.

Appearing at the sold out Parker Music House in Boston on September 23, 1861, Meagher delivered a speech fully recounted in *The Boston Morning Journal*. A classic Irish recruiting speech with the themes of Irish nationalism, hatred of England, and love of the Union and *The Constitution*, Meagher's popularity was such that many forged tickets were presented at the door. Accompanied by her husband on the piano, Mrs. Mooney sang "The Star Spangled Banner" followed by Miss Kenny's rendition of "The Green Above the Red" and predictions that Ireland would eventually defeat England. Then Massachusetts Governor Andrew introduced the speaker, Mr. Meagher...who "was received with hearty demonstrations of applause. After the subsidence of this, and the expulsion of an enebriated person from the assembly, he proceeded." He asserted that Irish blood had been spilled on battlefields the world over for good, indifferent, and bad causes

["those in support of English government"]. Now we were fighting for the best cause—that of a legitimately elected government. The "hot, violent Southerners" had no provocation for their act of indiscretion. "What single grievance is there to justify...rebellion? What inch of territory was invaded? What single item of...states' rights which the Constitution gives...was in the slightest degree violated or impaired?" The only reason why the revolt occurred was that the Southerners had "held the chair" for fifty years and could not reconcile the loss of power. Now they had "substituted the Mexican rule of election—the bayonet and cartridge box" instead of the ballot box. The Irish were reminded that England favored the South. That was almost enough reason in itself to support the North. "Every blow dealt against the revolution at the South is dealt at the cupidity and the claims of England...the triumph of the federal government will inflict a grievous wound in England." And now from this hall, "in the centre of the city where this insult to every Irish soldier was conceived, I proclaim it—know nothingism is dead! (applauded). This war, if it brought no other...lesson" continued Meagher, "brought with it this result—that the Irish soldier, from henceforth and forever, shall proudly stand by the side of the native born." And "in Ireland I was a revolutionist, but I am a conservative in America...because here in the United States under the working of the Constitution and under...equal laws, the people have their right."<sup>19</sup> Meagher was articulating covenanted patriotism. Prospective recruits were learning about patriotism from a most eloquent speaker and effective teacher.

In New York the previous week, Meagher had delivered another stem winder at the Academy of Music, and the *New York Daily Tribune's* reporter loved it. Meagher called himself "a revolutionist in the old country, a conservative in the new." The reporter saw Meagher's main idea as the establishment of Irish unity "through the fire and affliction of the great Republican trail"...as a true-blue Democrat, of the Jacksonian school, he sees "more danger and disgrace in the present efforts of the scheming Democratic politicians of the North, than in the platform of a party which constitutionally chose the President." There is..."something romantic about the orator from Ireland. Meagher is a melifluous [sic] man, and has the winning way with him."<sup>20</sup>

When not speaking, Meagher was involved in other facets of Irish Brigade organization work. On August 22, 1861, Meagher wrote to Judge Daly from 41 Ann Street and said that he needed Daly's input on the appointment of General Shields as Brigadier.<sup>20A</sup> And in another letter of August 23, 1861, (11 o'clock) Meagher again wrote Judge Daly, requesting a meeting "tomorrow morning at half past 9 o'clock, sharp, at the Astor House. This is a serious business with regard to Shields, and it is of the utmost consequence I should see you."<sup>20B</sup> That Meagher would become so involved with Judge Daly underscores the prominence of Daly in military affairs of the Irish community and Meagher's own central role as well. No doubt Meagher's very high visibility was one of the reasons why the War Department selected him as "Acting Brigadier" in October of 1861 after James Shields turned down the job due to its low rank.

Whether or not Meagher got command of the Brigade through political conniving as claimed by one scholar<sup>21</sup> is impossible to substantiate. Meagher did persuade "New York's Governor E.D. Morgan to grant official state backing for the idea of an Irish

Brigade."<sup>22</sup> Meagher no doubt campaigned for the job in the press in *The Irish American*, August 3, 10, 17, 1861, by publishing his account of the 69th New York regiment of N.Y.S.M. during its brief ninety days of service. Inflating his own importance and that of the 69th, one wonders how the Union lost First Bull Run. From his article published in *The Irish American* on the 17th of August, 1861, Meagher wrote that "no soldiers could have rushed to battle with heartier elasticity and daring than did soldiers of the 69th..." that their Brigadier, Colonel Sherman, "had no sympathy whatever with them" that they "had been precipitated into action when their term of service...had expired." Meagher continued by exclaiming that "the 69th, bearing the green flag presented to them in recognition of their refusal to participate in the reception of the Prince of Wales—still heartily and enthusiastically pressed on."<sup>23</sup> Meagher, however, was delighted to have the General's salary, and ordered the 69th regiment of the Brigade to Fort Schuyler, Throg's Neck, New York. The 63rd and 88th were camped nearby.

Soldier's pay was another matter. Indeed, inflation hit New York urban unskilled laborers hard during the war years, so soldiering became financially attractive. Studies of the cost of living show that consumer prices rose by 76 percent from 1860-64, while wages rose by only 42 percent. Therefore, workers' families standard of living declined substantially. Volunteers would receive a bonus of \$100.00 upon completion of enlistment. However, state, federal, and local bounties did not corrupt the recruiting process until the failure of the Peninsular Campaign; it was in the summer and fall of 1862 that recruiting turned more mercenary.<sup>24</sup> Until then the appeal of the skilled orator was invaluable. That Meagher was successful is obvious by the geographical expansion of recruiting from New York City, to Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. For a time Meagher thought himself capable of recruiting an entire division of Irish regiments and commanding them as Major General.<sup>25</sup> Organized in Boston in December just two months after Meagher's music hall speech and made up largely of Irish, the 28th Massachusetts joined the Irish Brigade on December 1, 1862. Two months earlier, the 116th Pennsylvania Cameron dragoons had joined the Brigade at Harper's Ferry and remained until October, 1864. The 116th Pennsylvania "is composed of the choicest material of Irishmen who I think will vie with their gallant countrymen and brothers, the 69th, in action."<sup>26</sup>

Next to the 69th, the 88th was the most famous regiment of the Brigade. Called by several names such as "Mrs. Meagher's own," "Connaught Rangers," and the "Faugh-A-Ballaghs," this unit was virtually an all Gaelic unit. Some had served in the British army in the Crimea and fought in the mutiny in India. At first, the officers and noncommissioned officers came from the sixty-ninth militia.<sup>27</sup> Then, others became prominent as warriors and as journalists such as *New York Times* reporter Captain W.L.D. O'Grady, and Meagher aide and *Irish American* reporter, Irish-born James Turner. Turner's columns for the *Irish-American* focussed on exactly the same themes Corcoran and Meagher had used earlier in recruitment: Irish nationalism, eventual defeat of Great Britain, and Irish gallantry.

Each regiment had been presented with two flags: one a national, and the other Irish. Tiffany's made the national flag which was six and a half by six feet. It was fringed with saffron colored silk and on the center stripe had inscribed the words "first, second, etc. regiment of the Irish Brigade. The mountings on the staff were gold plated,



Private William H. Tighe, Co. B, 88th Regt., NYS Vol. Inf.  
Photo Courtesy US Army Military History Institute

and two crimson tassels formed the pendants. Deep green and heavily fringed, the regimental flag had an Irish harp in the center, and above the harp a sunburst; over this, a scroll bearing the number of

the regiment." A wreath of shamrocks appeared under the harp and below this a second scroll bearing the motto in Irish, "Never retreat from the crash of spears."

The 63rd trained and camped at David's Island on the East River off Pelham. This regiment had two flags—a regimental one and a green flag. The regimental flag was made of blue silk with the motto, "sic igitur ad astra." The other flag had the arms of the state of New York on it and the motto, "vulneratus non victus" (wounded not conquered); a scroll underneath was labeled "63 New York volunteers."<sup>27A</sup>

By November of 1861 the New York Regiments of the Irish Brigade were ordered out of New York toward Harrisonburg, then to the Washington area. The 69th left on November 18th, the 63rd on the 28th and the 88th on the 16th of December, 1861. After marches down Fifth Avenue, and a blessing by Archbishop Hughes and Assistant Reverend Starr at Madison and 34th Street, the Brigade's units proceeded down Broadway to the Battery and boats. New Yorkers turned out on those days to wish their soldiers good luck. When the 69th left, "Wives clung to their husbands' arms, and in a number of instances consolation was sought in a draught from a mysterious black bottle."<sup>28</sup> When the 63rd left, it was a rowdy departure, and one which witnessed civilians rushing into the ranks handing liquor to the soldiers. A reporter at the scene commented that once aboard ship, "several men determined to see their friends once more, and to get a parting 'nip,' jumped overboard, and endeavored to swim to the docks. Whether any were drowned is not known."<sup>29</sup> Enthusiasm for the Irish Brigade was indeed omnipresent—especially in the recruiting role played by Judge Daly.

Several letters from the *Charles P. Daly Collection* of the New York Public Library, underscore the central role played by Judge Daly in the organization of the Brigade. The sutler of the Irish Brigade at Fort Schuyler, T.H. Carey, wrote on November 9, 1861, that he "respectfully invites the presence of Honorable Judge Daly at his (the Sutler's) apartment on Sunday, November 10. The boat leaves from Peckslip or James St. Slip at 11 a.m."<sup>29B</sup> And another letter from Mrs. Meagher to Judge Daly on November, 1861, noted that due to the postponing of the Brigade's departure until Monday, November 18th, "the presentation of colors will take place that day at ten o'clock, rain or shine, from the Archbishop's house, Madison Avenue, corner 36th Street. We hope you will address the officers and men...I will send Mrs. Daly tickets."<sup>29C</sup> The following note was saved in the Daly collection:

The Ladies' Committee  
-of-  
New York  
Having in Charge  
The Presentation of Colors  
-to-  
The Irish Brigade  
Have the Honor to Request the Presence of  
Judge & Mrs. Daly  
At the Residence of the  
Most Rev'd Archbishop Hughes  
9 o'clock, a.m.  
Monday, November 18th, 1861  
The Presentation Taking Place There at That Hour  
New York, November 13, 1861.<sup>29D</sup>

In Judge Daly's "Scrapbook" in *The Charles P. Daly Papers* at the New York Public Library is a newspaper clipping from the *New York Post* of November 19, 1861. In presenting the colors, the Judge selected themes of Irish nationalism and covenanted patriotism as Meagher had. Daly observed how "the green flag...recalls the period...when Ireland was a nation" and "conveys more eloquently than words, how her nationality was lost through the practical working of the Doctrine of Secession for which the rebellious states of the South have taken up arms." The happy period of Ireland's history under Brian Borihme ended and her miseries began "when her ambitious leaders [The Jefferson Davises of that period] overthrew the fabric of the national government and instituted in its stead distinct and separate sovereignties" through whose "internal weakness" and clashing interests..."was finally brought under the power of that stalwart English monarchy" which "since held her in its iron grasp." The Irishmen could learn his present duty in the war from "the history of his own country." The Judge finished his impassioned plea for filling up the ranks of the Irish Brigade for the duration of the war with an appeal to Irish nationalism and by parenthetically implying covenanted patriotism. In the war, the Irishman should "preserve that government which Montgomery died to create, and which those Irishmen who signed the Declaration of Independence...meant to transmit...to every Irishman." Daly noted that America had kept its part of the covenant by giving the Irish jobs, political influence, and the vote. The Irish race in America was as responsible as any other.

That Judge Daly was the central financial figure for the Brigade is apparent from a letter to the Judge from Douglas Taylor, who had a printing establishment in the Sun Building, corner of Fulton and Nassau Streets, New York. He wrote on December 11, 1861, that his firm had been engaged in printing materials for Meagher's Brigade. Meagher had suggested contacting Daly for arranging payment. Commented Taylor: "The entire total is but [unreadable]—in these hard times quite a considerable amount. I only feel justified in taking your valuable attention from the fact that Col. Meagher informed me of your interest in all matters pertaining to the Brigade...I should see you, and solicit your aid in obtaining payment for the very necessary printing ordered by him."<sup>29E</sup> Additionally, A. Stewart Black of the firm of Clyde and Black located at 401 Broadway wrote Judge Daly asking that the Judge use his influence with Meagher to get his nephew a position on Meagher's staff.<sup>29F</sup> And Assistant U.S. Attorney, J.T. Doyle wrote Judge Daly on December 27, 1861, and asked what the Judge wanted to do in terms of continuing to back the Irish Brigade in light of Meagher's appointment to head it up.<sup>29G</sup> The Judge continued his enthusiastic support of the Irish Brigade.

Confirmed by the Senate on February 3, 1862, as Brigadier General, Meagher and his Brigade were attached to the Army of the Potomac, Sumner's Division, and fought bravely in the Peninsula Campaign in the Spring and Summer of 1862. Southern observers remarked about the bravery of the Irish Brigade during these battles of the Peninsula. Meagher's Irishmen "offered the most heroic resistance" such that the Confederate soldiers "retired in great disorder." When General Cobb arrived his legion "renewed the attack. But the efforts of these troops were in vain. The brave Irishmen held their ground with determination which excited the admiration of our own officers."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, bravery later fostered the



Col. Patrick Kelly, 88th Regt., NYS Vol. Inf.  
Photo Courtesy US Army Military History Institute

sense Irish Brigade soldiers would have of being entitled to a Civil War pension, so statements by the enemy about the courage of these Irishmen are important.

Not only was the bravery of the ordinary soldier praised, but so was that of Meagher and his staff. Rufus King, Jr. noted from his position as an artillery officer how "General Meagher stood by one of the pieces, and, exposed to the hottest fire, assisted the men in



running the gun forward. Upon my telling him how near out of ammunition I was, he kindly volunteered to ride to General Richardson and have ammunition sent to me as soon as possible."<sup>31</sup> And the Chaplain of the Brigade, Father Corby, calls the staff of the Brigade "brilliant" and notes how the officers "were decked out not only with the regulation gold straps, stripes and cords on their coats, trousers and hats, but they also had great Austrian knots of gold on their shoulders, besides numerous other ornamentations in gold, which glittered in the Virginia sun enough to dazzle one."<sup>32</sup>

Before and after Meagher two brigadiers commanded the Irishmen fighting for the Union: Michael Corcoran and Thomas Smyth. Corcoran (1827-1863) hailed from County Sligo and emigrated to America in 1849, and eventually worked as a postal clerk. He rose from the ranks from private to colonel by 1859 of the 69th regiment of New York State Militia. He later organized the Corcoran Legion which was not part of the Irish Brigade, but usually campaigned with it. Aside from Corcoran, Thomas Smyth also led the Irish.

Brigadier-General Thomas Smyth (1832-65) was born in County Cork and emigrated to America in 1854 when he was 22. He worked for his uncle in Philadelphia in the carriage business, then moved to Wilmington. Considered an intellectual, he left his studies of the humanities at the outbreak of the war, recruited a company which he led as Captain in the Twenty-Fourth Pennsylvania Volunteers, then took the job of Major in the First Delaware. In March, 1864, he was appointed as Irish Brigade Commander. Loved by his men and gallant in battle, he was shot in the face near Farmville while riding outside the picket-lines just two days before Lee's surrender. He was a fierce Irish nationalist just like Meagher and Corcoran were before him.

Other officers of note of the Irish Brigade include, for the 69th, General Robert Nugent, Lieutenant Colonel James E. McGee and Surgeon William O'Meagher; for the 88th, Colonel Patrick Kelly, Adjutant John R. Young, First Lieutenant Charles M. Grainger, Second Lieutenant William L. D. O'Grady, Surgeon Francis Reynolds and Reverend William Corby; for the 63rd, Colonel John Burke, Colonel John Gleason, Surgeon Laurence Reynolds and Captain John Kavanagh.

What issues had motivated these leaders to join the Irish Brigade in addition to patriotism (motivation of the recruits will be treated later on)? First, some of these leaders must have been "on the make" (just like Meagher) politically and socially. War provided the opportunity for inclusion and for upward social mobility. This should not be clouded by the public recruiter's language of high moral principle; they wanted in and up. Secondly, that some of the officers of the Irish Brigade had been Irish nationalists or members of the radical organizations of Young Ireland is most interesting. No doubt some of them thought that by fighting against the South, England's ally, they were continuing the struggle against England. Whether or not men like Meagher, James McGee, and John Kavanagh were actually planning to use the trained Irish troops from the Civil War to one day fight against England is only a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, there were 400 Fenians recruited in one unit and called The Empire Brigade. It was a separate Brigade from the Irish Brigade. All of these gallant leaders recruited soldiers and helped Meagher's Brigade fight, but such heavy

casualties were inflicted by the summer of 1862 that Meagher asked for and received permission to recruit for his Brigade in New York. After all, the 69th had lost "from 750 men, at Fair Oaks, to 295 after the battle of Malvern Hill. The 88th had lost 200 men and the 63rd, which had suffered the least, was down to 500."<sup>33</sup> And soldiers' reports of life at the front had reached home in sufficient numbers to make the recruiters' job difficult.

From Yorktown on May 9th, 1862, Private Patrick J. Reilly wrote that "I suppose this reaches you that small sum (twenty dollars) I sint [sic] home...I gave Father Willet the money to send home by express." Conditions in the field were harsh such that "on our march Monday it commenced raining...and we marched into Yorktown about four miles and dark overcame us we got ordered to march until told to stop and we did march on through one of the muddiest roads that ever I saw" and "it pitch dark not a star to be seen sometimes slipping and falling into holes knee deep and the mud at times over our shoes and mind you it raining all this time I tell you...would make my blood creep to think of such a march"...These "destructive missles called torpedoes" were "buried in the ground for the destruction of our army"...Yet "the boys would start up a scratch of a song such as 'Dorans Ass,' 'Coming From the Wake,' 'Free and Easy,' 'Bould Sojer Boy' and others too numerous to mention."<sup>33A</sup> With stories sent home like this, recruiting was becoming more challenging.

In July and August of 1862, Irish Brigade enrollment faced obstacles. Lincoln's call for 300,000 volunteers at the end of June inspired New York's Governor Morgan to proclaim on July 2, 1862, a fifty dollar bounty in addition to the twenty-five dollar bounty of the U.S. Government. Morgan's bounty commenced on July 17 and was extended to September 1, 1862. Since there was uncertainty when or if the bounties were to be paid, bounties had little effect on recruiting. The ordinary citizen probably thought that since the draft was imminent that he should hold out for more money as a substitute which would be more than he could get with bounties. Meagher, however, obviously aware that his own future depended on recruiting Irishmen for his Brigade, would not be deterred.<sup>34</sup>

Ordered by McClellan to recruit, Meagher had arrived in New York on Friday night, July 18, 1862.<sup>34A</sup> The *New York Times* article called his leadership brilliant and the Brigade's action (at the Chickahominy, Fair Oaks, Gaines Mill and Malvern Hill) gallant. The reporter observed that Meagher was in consultation with members of the Irish Brigade Committee under whose auspices he had raised the Brigade last fall. The Executive Committee consisted of Messrs. "Daniel Devon (Chairman), Richard O'Gorman, Richard Bell, Joseph Stuart, Charles P. Daly, Andrew Carrigan, James O'Grady, Samuel Sloan, William Mitchell, John Savage and John T. Doyle. There is no doubt that the General's countrymen will enthusiastically rally to the flag of the Irish Brigade."<sup>34B</sup>

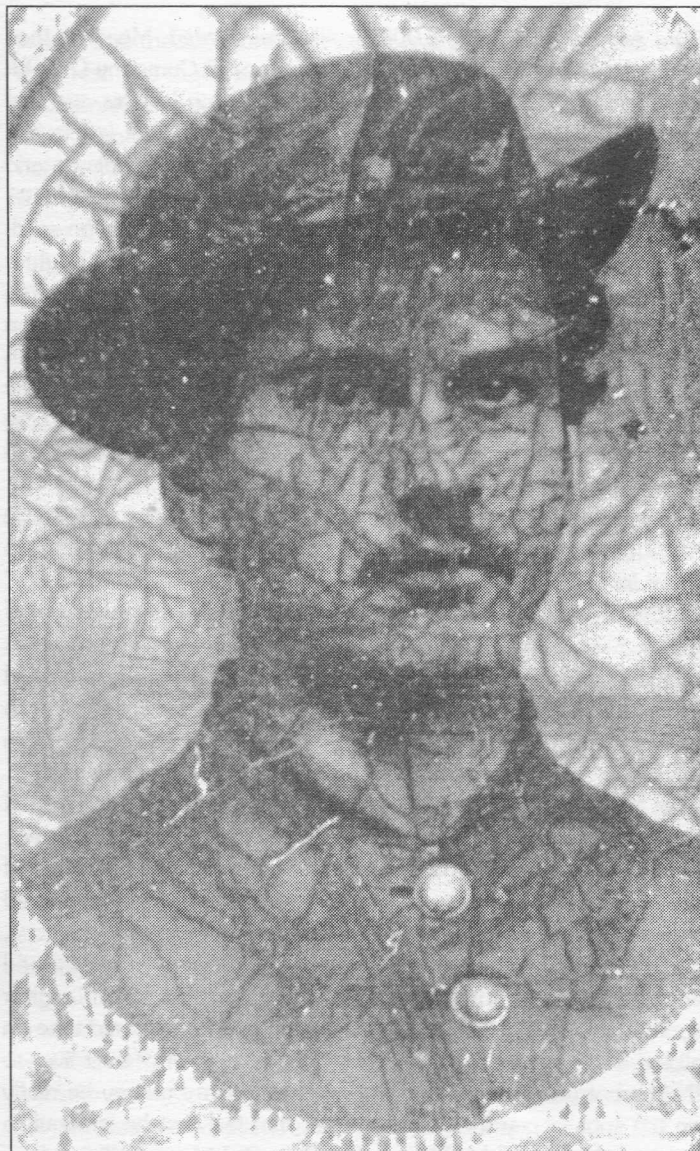
A recruiting speech by Judge Daly delivered July 4, 1862, at Tammany Hall, was made two weeks before Meagher's return to New York and reprinted in *The Irish American* of July 19, 1862. That the speech was one of his favorites is obvious since it appears in his *Scrapbook* found in *The Charles P. Daly Papers*. To paraphrase the speech, the Judge remarked that ceaseless emigration over three centuries lead "to a powerful nation under the government of democratic institutions" which the South "would

destroy the structure it had cost centuries to erect” and “which has leagued in its suicidal policy, the feeblest, the least enlightened, and the most aristocratic, of those...living under a democratic government.” Judge Daly’s American history lesson stressed the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation when “we were a cluster of nationalities and not a nation.” We became a nation “with the adoption of a constitution”...a “spectacle of gigantic growth...under a democratic national government”...“a blow has been struck at the fabric we have reared... which it has now become our duty as men and as patriots to consider.” He goes on to say that our democracy did not grow from “the political teachings of speculative writers; but...from our...mutual dependence upon each other”...It...“is the only form of government under which we could, or can advance as a people.” Education of the people is paramount in our system. “Unrestricted freedom...will produce great intellectual and material development, gradually elevating the mass.” In our republican system men are taught self-reliance; in aristocratic systems like the South the condition “of the whole people” is “retarded” because “the labor there...is performed by a servile class...the relation of master and serf.” European emigrants did not work there; slaves did. The aristocratic South “exalt themselves...over what they call their blood and descent:”...“A high-souled race, descended from a stock wholly different from the ‘mud-sills,’ as they term the masses of the North.” And “slavery must be left to take care of itself...every other consideration must be merged in the great duty of maintaining the authority of government by force of arms.” And “the principles of republican government are on trial in this great contest. Upon us has fallen the responsibility of preserving it”...Once again the Irish were being taught the necessity of defending the Union. After all, they were keepers of the covenant. Judge Daly had primed New York for Meagher’s return; he had continued to instill covenanted patriotism.

For Meagher and his staff, recruiting for the Brigade occurred at many places in the city. Wherever recruiters set up, the *New York Times* reported that “every day the veterans of the Peninsula are sending deputations to press, upon the volunteering population here...the wisdom of associating themselves with tried and war-taught comrades, rather than with regiments that have yet to earn their laurels.”<sup>34C</sup> The Irish Brigade, said the *Times*, needed recruits.<sup>34D</sup>

Meagher and his staff visited Wallack’s Theater located on the corner of Broadway and 13th Street on the evening of July 24, 1862. The *New York Times* reported impressive support for the Irish Brigade in that “When the General entered Wallack’s Theater the people rose en masse and cheered, ladies waived their handkerchiefs, and the greatest enthusiasm was manifested.” The General then thanked them and said he was indebted “to the bravery of the officers and men of his Brigade... In conclusion, the General appointed all the ladies present recruiting officers for the Irish Brigade. The box in which the General sat was decorated with American and Irish flags...”<sup>34E</sup>

On July 25, 1862, Meagher spoke at the Seventh Regiment Armory at Tomkin’s Market. The July 26, 1862 issue of the *Times* carried a headline which included phrases like “CEAD MILLE FAILTHE, Gen. Meagher Recruiting The Irish Brigade, The Emerald Isle Will Aid the Gem of the Ocean, Enthusiastic



Pvt. John M. Reynolds, Co. A., 69th Regt. N.Y.S. Vol. Inf.  
Photo Courtesy US Army Military History Institute

Gathering.” The reporter noted that the room was...“too small to accommodate even half of the ten thousand who suffered to demonstrate by their presence...the memory was ablaze with light, and brilliant with the flags of Ireland and America”...the appearance of the band “gave ‘the Exile of Erin,’ ‘St. Patrick’s Day,’ ‘Gary Owen!’...the boys were in an excellent humor, and cheered the policemen who ordered the windows opened”...and noted that “thirty gentlemen” had “helped themselves to water from the speaker’s pitcher”; a “reckless individual” threw up “stools toward the platform, landing them on the heads of unfortunate bystanders.” There were “calls and hisses for ‘Greeley.’” At 8 o’clock, Meagher, accompanied by Daniel Devlin and others, took his seat underneath a huge banner—“HEADQUARTERS OF THE IRISH BRIGADE.” On another occasion Meagher would discuss the casualties of the Brigade, but now, “The Irish Brigade needed reinforcements (a voice—They’ll have it) (Cheers)” and Meagher proceeded to state the losses by regiment of New York Infantry; the 69th down to 295; the 88th down to 400 having lost 200; the

63rd needed 200 men; 2,000 in all were needed. Meagher then read a letter from Lieutenant J.H. Donovan, of Company D, 69th Regiment of New York Infantry. Though having lost his eye that "he had one eye left and would fight for the Union yet (applause). And, if he lost his other eye, he would 'go it blind'" (applause and roars of laughter). Meagher said that "no soldiers could be better fed..." the whiskey ration (cheers)...had been withdrawn on medical grounds, and that was the hardest privation they had (laughter and applause)"...Hard fighting had "thinned the ranks—fighting that was the glory and pride of Irishmen. Meagher delivered an earnest, patriotic, thrilling and eloquent appeal to the Irishmen in America to do their duty...by reinforcing at once the ranks of the Irish Brigade." He then announced that the recruiting office of the Brigade would be opened at the old stand (No. 596 Broadway) and retired amid a storm of applause."<sup>34F</sup>

Following all of those tested recruiting themes worked because the *Times* reported on July 29, 1862, that the recruiters had to move from the old quarters at 596 Broadway to "spacious rooms" at 398 Broadway; Major Warrenton of General Meagher's staff manned the station. "Today a splendid banner, bearing the names of the engagements wherein the Irish Brigade has distinguished itself, will be suspended from the building across the street. Branch offices will be opened in every part of the City, and there is little doubt there will be another grand rally around the green flag."<sup>34G</sup>

On the evening of July 29, 1862, General Meagher and his staff attended a play at Niblo's Theater, Broadway and Prince Street, entitled "Coleen Bawn," an Irish drama. The General and his staff sat "to the stage box at the right, which was beautifully draped with the American and Irish flags, and where, upon his entrance, he was greeted with three tremendous vocal tokens of regard and consideration"<sup>34H</sup> and then between acts of the play Meagher spoke. He said that recruiting was slowed by too much red tape on all levels of government"; "that those who freely offer their lives to their country are properly treated; let the bounty money be ready on the spot to pay the recruit and let him feel that he is about to serve a country which will attend to his interests now..."<sup>34I</sup>

There were several reasons why recruiting was difficult in the Summer of 1862. First, bounties were paid only for three year enlistments for those who could pass the examinations. How would this affect those who wished to join an old regiment—already in the field? Soon, the bounty was extended to cover the old regiments too. Secondly, New York state recruiters had to stay in their own districts and recruit, and this was difficult since their own districts were often co-terminus with senatorial districts whose leaders were recruiting from these districts. While New York City was virtually wide open for recruiting, the rest of New York State was off limits to them. The press criticized Governor Morgan for favoring the formation of new regiments. Thirdly, *The New York Herald* of September 11, 1862, suggested that Corcoran had a resentment against Meagher who had built up his own brigade at the expense of the old 69th Regiment of N.Y.S.M., Corcoran's former regiment. In a letter to his friend, Captain James Kirker in December, 1861, Corcoran wrote: "To the men who took advantage of my absence to break up the old Sixty-Ninth for the advancement of their own sordid interest, under the mark of patriotism, I shall have something to say on a more favorable occasion."<sup>34J</sup> So Irishmen

loyal to Corcoran might not have joined Meagher's unit.

While nobody knows exactly how many men were recruited by the end of the Summer of 1862, just before the Antietam campaign in September, the Irish Brigade probably had 1,600 men; perhaps over half had been recruited in August. The press reported that "the recruiting officers of the Irish Brigade have been much more successful in enrolling recruits than any other organization." With the draft at hand, "there will be no opportunity to pick a corps. In the Irish Brigade they will fight under the immortal Green, and have the comforts of the old religion to which most of them belong. They cannot expect this in other regiments."<sup>35</sup>

With fresh recruits Meagher rejoined his command in mid-August just in time to see action. About one month later McClellan ordered Richardson's division, to which the Irish Brigade was attached, into the combat.<sup>36</sup> Lee's army of 41,000 men had occupied positions east of the Potomac River in Sharpsburg, Maryland. McClellan's army of 87,000 men occupied positions due east of the Potomac and north and east of Sharpsburg on both sides of a creek. The name of the creek was Antietam. There, "the 63rd and the 69th suffered 60 percent casualties attacking the Sunken road."<sup>36A</sup> Seated on his horse, close to the 69th, Meagher stated in his official military report that he "personally ordered them to charge upon the rebel columns...confident that before such a charge the rebel column would give way and be dispersed."<sup>37</sup> The Irish Brigade, however, retreated. Meagher's horse was shot out from under him and he was taken unconscious from the battlefield. Meagher later estimated that only 500 men were left in the Brigade. Both armies lost about 12,000 men each in what was the single most bloody day of the war. Lee had not been driven from his positions.

The Irish Brigade was reinforced in early October at Harper's Ferry by the 116th Pennsylvania and the 28th Massachusetts. Meagher now commanded these plus the three New York Regiments and the 29th Massachusetts (not an all-Irish unit). In early November, 1862, the Army of the Potomac under its new commander, Burnside, marched in the direction of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and occupied positions across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg. The Chaplain of the Irish Brigade, Father Corby, estimated that since mid-August the Irish Brigade had been on the march constantly for about 600 miles.<sup>38</sup> Exhausted, cold, and hungry, the damp weather between Thanksgiving and Christmas added to the uncomfortable feelings. One enlisted soldier of the Irish Brigade's 28th Massachusetts, Peter Welsh, wrote to his wife on December 8, 1862, near Fredericksburg that she should "not fret and worry so much" and "not pay so much regard to what you read in the newspapers for they do not know much about matters here" and that "not even Generals themselves can tell when a battle will take place it all depends on circumstances and there is no probability of our having a battle here at present and it is doubtful if there will be any fighting done at this point at all."<sup>39</sup>

Peter Welsh was wrong about how soon the next battle would be. Since apparently Burnside felt that Lincoln and the public wanted a victory, he ordered an attack centered on Marye's Heights behind the City of Fredericksburg. The Irish Brigade would be one of the leaders in the attack.

Fourteen Brigades in all assaulted Marye's Heights that afternoon of December 13th. They had been opposed by four ranks of Georgia and North Carolina riflemen who fired in a synchronized fashion from behind a fortified position supported by artillery.<sup>40</sup> Such slaughter prompted Lee's famous remark to Longstreet: "It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it."<sup>41</sup>

Meagher's Brigade retreated across the River, and returned to Fredericksburg. Meagher assembled his men the next day. "Of the one thousand two hundred I led into action the day before, two hundred and eighty only appeared on that ground that morning." A modern scholar's calculation of the disaster reads more precisely. "Of the 1,300 members of the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg, 545 were killed, wounded or missing in action."<sup>42</sup> Peter Welsh wrote to his wife on December 18th from Camp: "it was a fierce and bloody battle [sic] our brigade got terribly cut up [sic] it is so small now that it is not fit to go into any further action unless it is recruited up [sic] so you need not be uneasy now about me for the rest of the fighting will have to be done without our aid" [sic].<sup>43</sup> It was probably the last time that Meagher's Irish fought together as a Brigade. And there were many accounts of the bravery, heroism, and patriotism of the Irish Brigade.

George Pickett wrote to his wife how brave the Irish were. "If war, my own, is a necessity—and I suppose it is—it is a very cruel one...Your soldier's heart almost stood still as he watched those sons of Erin fearlessly rush to their death. The brilliant assault... was beyond description. Why, my darling, we forgot they were fighting us, and cheer after cheer at their fearlessness went up along our lines."<sup>44</sup> And the London *Times* reporter with Lee's army said that "never at Fontenoy, Albuera, or at Waterloo was more undoubted courage displayed by the sons of Erin than during those six frantic dashes which they directed against the almost impregnable position of their foe."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, comments like these by a Southern general and an English reporter about the bravery of the soldiers of the Irish Brigade gave the notion of entitlement to Brigade members to be Americans. Patriotism was actual now rather than incipient.

What made the men of the Irish Brigade so brave? In his book *Morale*, John C. M. Baynes studied the second Scottish rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in 1915 in order to determine what factors caused men to behave courageously. (He might as well have been writing about the soldiers of the Irish Brigade.) To paraphrase Baynes' major conclusion about courage—the planned outcome of proper morale—peer pressure of the regiment made men of the ranks brave. Proper morale itself was the result of a variety of factors including charismatic leaders who led by example and by instruction; order and discipline gave security which could "mean much to a man reared in a slum tenement"; the soldier found "happiness...in comradeship and loyalty to his regiment." When in the midst of combat chaos all seemed lost, why did men continue to fight so hard? Baynes found "the biggest thing of all was that the battalion should do well; this bound all ranks together as nothing else could do." For the Scottish rifles "there was one overriding fear, and that was that he should let the battalion and his company down when the great moment came." And welded together in this way...[they] welcomed the coming of the battle, and were not, I believe, put out by its outcome. There was no bitterness after-

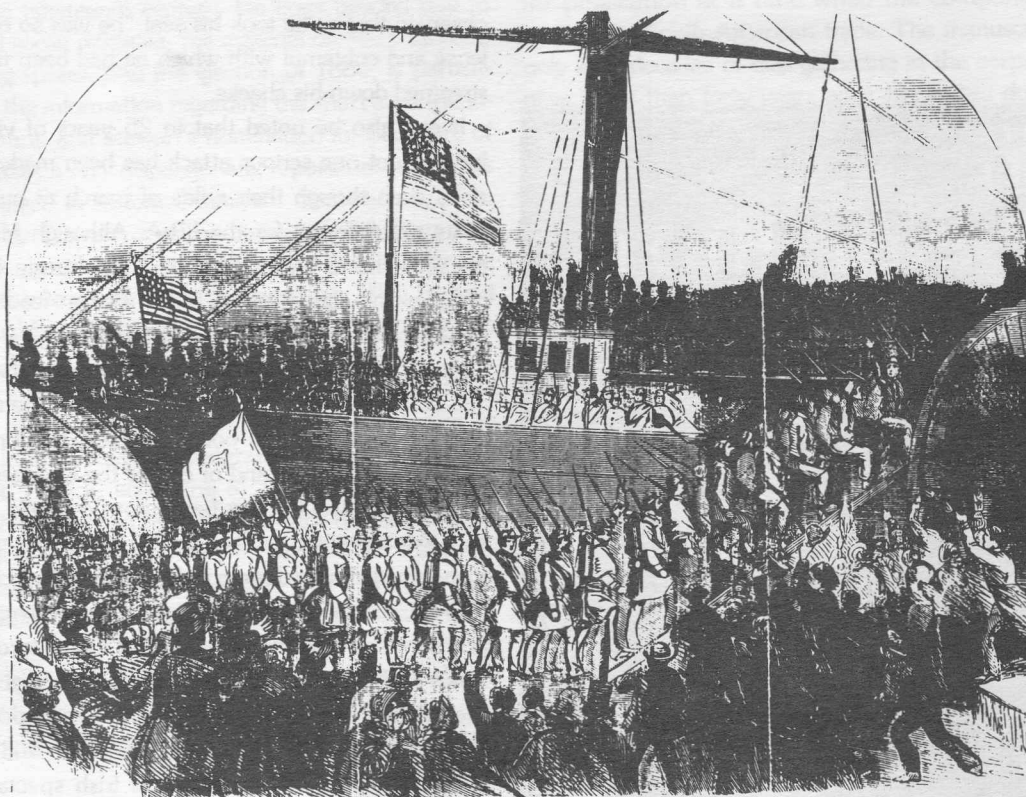
wards, and the survivors were again ready for anything after a few days rest." As to the importance of the leader in the formation and maintenance of morale, Baynes thought "the leader knows that other men look to him, and he is supported by their concern in his doings...connected to some extent with the morale of the leader is the question of belief in a cause." And why "the men who came from the poorest classes were patriotic was due to their ignorance...they followed the lead given by their officers and N.C.O.'s. The officers and N.C.O.'s were strongly patriotic and so the more simple echoed their sentiments unhesitatingly."<sup>45A</sup>

Meagher returned to New York in January, 1863, to lobby for the return of the Irish Brigade to the city for rest and for replenishing its depleted ranks. The authorities said no. *The Irish American* cried discrimination, but there is no evidence that the men in the ranks felt discriminated against. The writer, however, felt that "if the Brigade were not so markedly and distinctively Irish, they would not have been treated with the positive injustice and neglect to which they have been exposed."<sup>46</sup> To relieve some of the hurt, a Requiem Mass was held on January 16, 1863, at St. Patrick's Cathedral for the dead of the Irish Brigade. Judge Daly received a special invitation.<sup>46A</sup> Afterwards, the dignitaries made their way to Delmonico's and Meagher spoke. "I give you 'The Stars and Stripes,' and the heroism of both armies...I shall never be a Major-General after this."<sup>47</sup>

Reaching his men in mid-February, 1863, he would soon return home on disability leave for rheumatism in April, and resign on May 14, 1863. Meagher's resignation had been precipitated because he was not allowed to recruit even though the Irish Brigade was a unit greatly reduced in numbers "scarcely having enough men to make up a good size regiment,"<sup>47A</sup> and did not fight together as a unit during the Confederates' Chancellorsville victory. Immediately after crossing the Rappahannock and setting up camp at Falmouth, Meagher had asked for time to recruit his Brigade back to strength in New York, but General Hooker and the War Department denied his request. Every man was needed. "The very reliability of the Irish Brigade was one of the reasons that General Hooker was reluctant to let it go home. The Irish never refused an order and turned out to do their duty even when it was necessary to call on invalids and drummer boys to fill the ranks. There was never a question of disloyalty...They were not allowed to rest and recruit."<sup>47B</sup>

After some public relations work for the cause of the Union, Meagher wrote the War Department and asked that his command be reinstated. Finally, in September of 1864, Meagher reported to Sherman's command at Nashville, and then on to the command of General Thomas who placed Meagher in charge of convalescents guarding railroads in the vicinity of Chattanooga. By January of 1865, Meagher returned to Nashville, and after shuttling Union troops around, was apparently drunk on duty the evening of February 5, 1865, and ordered home on the 20th. He resigned in May, 1865, and headed out West to become the acting Governor of Montana territory. He died on July 1, 1867, when he drowned in the Missouri River after falling off the deck of a steamship at night. His body was never recovered, and neither was his reputation. Soldier Maurice Woulfe had written a letter home to his

(Continued on page 68)

**War and Recruitment...** Continued from page 33

The sixty-ninth (Irish) Regiment embarking in the "James Adger" for the War, April 23, 1861. (*Harper's*, May 4, 1861.)

family in Ireland before Meagher's death. The letter is Meagher's most telling epitaph: "I was speaking to a Sergeant here that served under Meagher. He told me that he was a gentleman and a soldier, but that he wanted to gain so much praise he would not spare his men."<sup>47C</sup> He was a different man after Fredericksburg, and there is a debate about whether or not he was an alcoholic.

On St. Patrick's Day of 1863, we are left with a vivid description of the Irish culture at work after the horrors of the Fredericksburg defeat.<sup>48</sup> There was to be a Steeple-Chase with a winning purse of \$500.00. The quartermaster returned from Washington with thirty-five hams, roasted ox, stuffed pigs and lots of poultry. The alcohol officially bought "comprised eight baskets of champagne, ten gallons of rum, and twenty-two of whiskey. A splendid bower was erected, capable of containing some hundreds of persons, for a general invitation was issued to all the officers of the Army of the Potomac."<sup>49</sup> After morning mass, preparations for the race began. Many of the officers of the Brigade had entered horses for the several races, and they had rather colorful names including "Jack Hinton" (Meagher's), "Napper Tandy" (Captain Hogan), "Kathleen Mavourneen" (Captain Martin), "Nigger Bill" (Captain Langdon), etc. Between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. they raced, then partied. Officers, enlisted men, and ladies down from Washington continued to be amused by games including a foot-race, casting weights, running after the soaped pig, the wheelbarrow race, and a dance contest.<sup>50</sup>

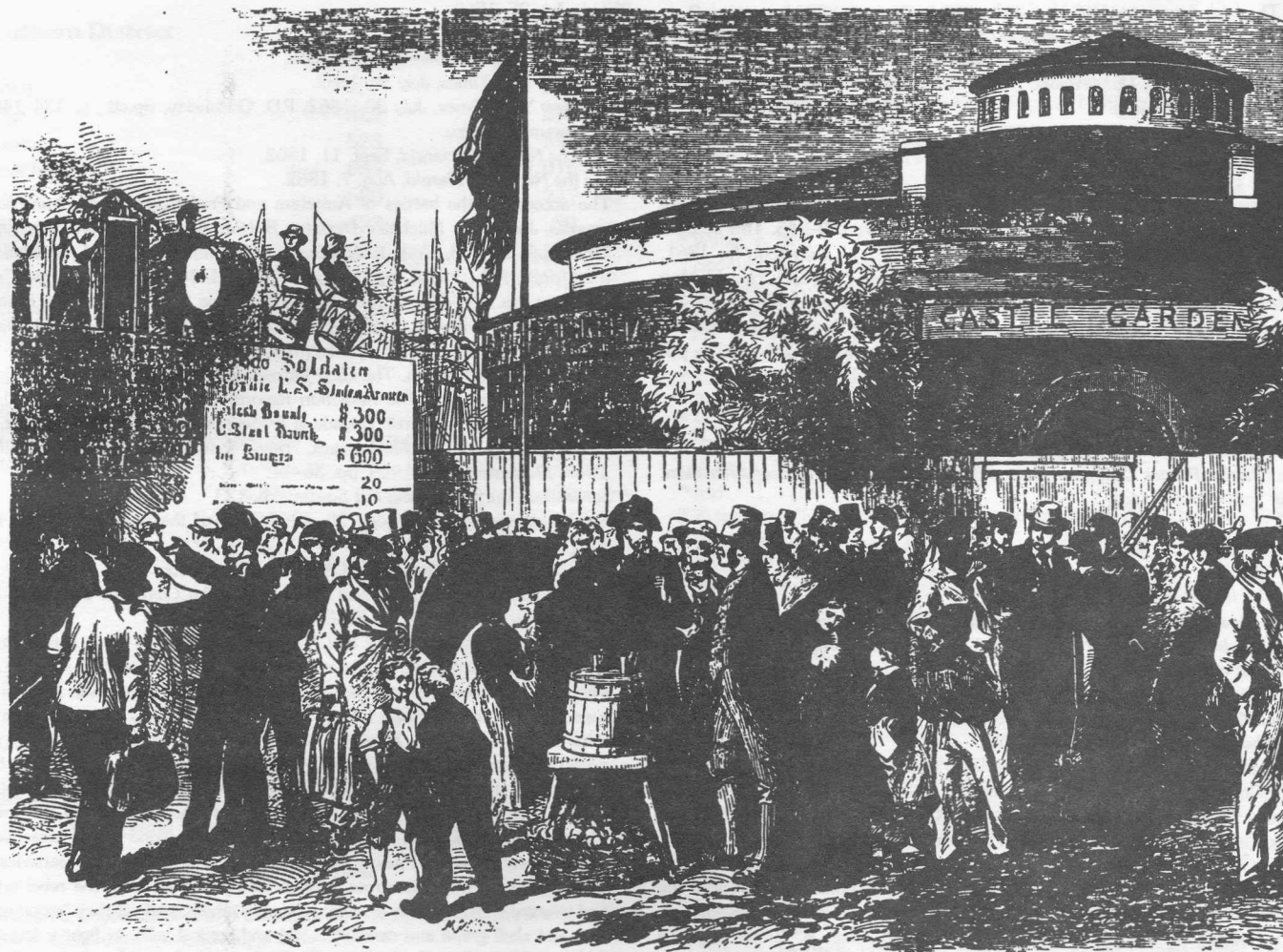
At night the entertainment took a more literary bent. Dr. Laurence Reynolds, the poet laureate of the Irish Brigade and the Surgeon of the 63rd, read a poem, after which Captain Blake sang the "Song of The Irish Brigade" written by an anonymous author.

A chorus from this song sums up recruiters' themes.

*Now we're pledged to free this land,  
So long the exile's resting place;  
To crush for aye a traitorous band,  
And wipe out treason's deep disgrace.  
then let us pledge Columbia's cause,  
God prosper poor old Ireland, too!  
We'll trample on all tyrant law:  
Hurrah for the old land and the new!*<sup>51</sup>

A chapter of the history of the Irish Brigade ended soon after this March 17, 1863, St. Patrick's Day celebration. After Meagher's retirement three other Irishmen commanded the Brigade, and all were killed in action: Patrick Kelly, Richard Byrne, and Thomas Smyth. Nevertheless, they, like Meagher, were effective recruiters. Courage in combat, entitlement, and recruiting continued until the end of the war. Etched in the military history records of great battles such as Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg is the valor of the Irish Brigade.

The Irish Brigade recruits and their families earned their citizenship in the Civil War. The guardians of the covenant (the Federal Government), gave their stamp of approval by awarding the Civil War pension. The recruits had been conditioned, coddled, schooled, and trained earlier in social institutions such as the workplace, the Roman Catholic Church and its ancillary social welfare agencies, and the Union Army. The Civil War pensions bridged class and race divisions and defined recipients broadly as "Union army veterans" as opposed to Negroes (African-Americans), German-Americans, or Irish-Americans.



Near Castle Garden in New York City's Battery Park, Irish immigrants were recruited to join the Union Army in the Civil War. (Engraving from the *London Illustrated News*, September 17, 1864.)

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Since there is no reliable history of the Irish Brigade, one must piece together from various sources the military history part of the story. The first two paragraphs follow the most accurate available account by surviving officers of the 63rd, 69th, and 88th Regiments of New York Infantry at the July, 1888, dedication of the Irish Brigade monument at Gettysburg. See "New York at Gettysburg" in *Monuments Commissions for the Battlefields of Gettysburg, Chattanooga, and Antietam: Final Report of the Battlefield of Gettysburg*, II (Albany, 1900), 475-516; see Patrick D. O'Flaherty's *History of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment in the Irish Brigade, 1861 to 1865* (New York, 1986), pp. 1-50; David Power Conyngham, *The Irish Brigades* (New York, 1866), pp. 1-300. The recruiting story for the Irish Brigade is new and is based on primary materials including the *New York Times* and the *Irish American*.

<sup>2</sup>The Brigade was enlarged in October of 1862 to include the 116th Pa. and on December 1, the 28th Mass. After October of 1862 the 7th New York Heavy Artillery replaced the 116th and on March 25, 1865, they in turn were replaced by the 4th New York Heavy Artillery. See Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 118-124. See William Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (Ames, IA), p. 112-144.

<sup>3</sup>The leadership information in this chapter follows the account of R.G. Atheam's *Thomas Francis Meagher: An Irish Revolutionary in America* (New York, 1976) and Denis Gwynn, Thomas Francis Meagher in *The O'Donnell Lecture* (delivered at University College Cork, July 17, 1961); Conyngham, *The Irish*

*Brigade*, pp. 523-599.

<sup>4</sup>See Patrick D. O'Flaherty, *The History of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment in the Irish Brigade*, p. 134. A summary of Union Army Enrollment is in McPherson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 309, 312, 317, 318, 323, 326-328, 330, 430, 485, 491-493, 592, 600, 611, 719-721; and Eugene C. Murdock, *Patriotism Limited: 1862-1865: The Civil War Draft and the Bounty System* (Oberlin, 1967), pp. 16-80; and *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Madison, 1971), pp. 6-7. See Chapter III for a brief overview of Union Civil War enrollment—including the bounty system.

<sup>4a</sup>See Florence Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892* (New York, 1951), p. 173.

<sup>4b</sup>See William Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup>See Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 118, and following; William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (Ames, IA, 1988), Chapters 4, 6, 10; Florence Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892* (New York, 1951), Chapter 6; Ernest A. McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse, 1990), pp. 48-103; *The Irish American*, April 27, 1861, and May 4, 1861.

<sup>6</sup>See *The Irish American*, April 27, 1861.

<sup>6a</sup>See Ernest McKay, *The Civil War and New York City*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup>*The Irish American*, May 4, 1861.

<sup>8</sup>See Florence Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup>William G. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, p. 51.