Antipodean Identities: Violent Behaviors, Pugilism and Irish Immigrant Culture in New South Wales, 1830-1861

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Entitled
Antipodean Identities: Violent Behaviors, Pugilism and Irish Immigrant Culture in New South Wales, 1830-1861

For the degree of Master of Arts

Is approved by the final examining committee:

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Approved by Major Professor(s): David Atkinson

Approved by: John Larson 04/18/2013 Head of the Graduate Program Date
This paper is dedicated to:

My parents, who have always supported and loved me unconditionally, even when I chose a career in academia. Love you guys.

My brother David, who remains one of the coolest people I’ve ever known.

My amazing, hilarious, supportive and beautiful wife, Aaron.

Finally, I dedicate this to Remington, who daily reminds me of the joy of life.
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ABSTRACT

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This essay examines the spaces in which Irish immigrants renegotiated negative stereotypes of wanton violence that accompanied them to New South Wales in the Early Victorian period. This process occurred by way of legitimizing violence through an Anglicized cultural filter or by curbing violence in instances where it was expected and publicly denounced. As these immigrants adapted to normative notions surrounding proper forms of violence and masculinity, they contributed to an overall shift in Australian cultural identities that recognized the significant Irish minority as a viable and valuable component of colonial society.
INTRODUCTION

On November 7, 1835 the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* ran a colorful story in its police report section concerning the court case of a local law enforcement office. The newspaper reported that one Constable Moore, an Irish immigrant employed as an enforcer of the law, had arrested Edward Whelan, a delivery man, after intervening in an argument between Whelan and a local Sydney shopkeeper. The court initially convened to ascertain Whelan’s sentence, but what began as a hearing over a small disturbance quickly turned into an indictment of the constable’s actions. Eyewitnesses at the hearing insisted that Moore unjustifiably provoked Whelan and went so far as to strike him upon the head with his shillelagh, without due provocation.

According to the newspaper report, a crowd quickly gathered in the street as the tense situation escalated. At some point, a number of onlookers succeeded in disarming Moore of his shillelagh, the purpose of which, according to the report, was “to render the encounter on a more equal footing.” Deprived of his weapon, Moore was then soundly beaten by his onetime victim, and the black-eyed constable returned with reinforcements to arrest formally Whelan. When asked to explain his actions that led to such an incident, Moore, “in a rich Tipperary brogue,” denied that he unjustifiably attacked Whelan and argued that he had been mistreated and the authority of his office disrespected. The magistrate ended the hearing in favor Whelan, whom he released without punishment for
his self-defense. An angry Moore was left with a stern reminder of the responsibilities of his post, and afterward received an official censure for his behavior from his superiors.¹

The story of the chastened Irish constable serves as an illustrative example of the collisions that occurred between Irish immigrants and the social regulations that governed rules of violent encounters in the colony. There are several noteworthy observations one may draw from this particular episode. Firstly, the position Moore enjoys as a constable of the law in Sydney is noteworthy in itself. That an Irishman, a person pilloried by Britons for centuries as among the lowest form of humanity, could gain such a station of authority speaks to the measure of egalitarian leveling affected by the endemic labor shortage of in colony.² However, by the newspaper’s rendering, Moore also cuts the figure of the stereotypical Hibernian. The linguistic marker of his brogue matches the physical medium by which he enforces his authority: the shillelagh, a singularly Irish weapon long associated with Celtic clannishness and violence. This is accompanied by the perceived haste with which Moore brandished his weapon in the street, which also aligns with the hotheadedness typically attributed to Irish behavior.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this story is the reaction of passers-by to Moore’s violent actions. As Moore engages Whelan (whose nationality is not explicit in the story, but who also carries an Irish surname) in physical combat, members of the gathering crowd stir to action; however, rather than acting to stop the violence, they alter the conditions of the fight to make it more sporting. By disarming Moore of his advantage, the colonists sought to make the fight a fairer one, as though observing

¹ The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, November 7, 1835.
unwritten rules of honorable combat between two men. In the end Moore is defeated, first physically and then morally after receiving an official denouncement of his behavior.

This essay analyzes the behavioral norms governing acts of individual violence in the emerging colonial culture of early Victorian New South Wales. By examining locations in which violence, both spontaneous and organized, was experienced between Irish immigrants and their British neighbors, it becomes evident that interconnected notions of proper combat, honorable masculinity and normative social behavior served to function as a tripartite vehicle to regulate aspects of Irish immigrant culture. Adhering to these social standards set by the colonists of British origin and sensibility, Irish arrivals to the colony experienced a tempering of their immigrant traditions. This process allowed them to successfully integrate into a broader social fabric that continued to recognize people by traditional markers of nation, religion and class, but did not exclusively acknowledge them by these parameters. As these established means of identifying social others were at least partially fragmented by the process of colonization, other considerations, gained prominence in the minds of Australian colonists. One of the more significant questions hovering over new arrivals from Ireland was whether they would pursue their ostensibly culturally innate tendencies of discord and violence (as perceived by Britons according to longstanding cultural prescriptions), or if they would behave in accordance with their fellow settlers in promoting a truly civilized society on the imperial frontier.

The middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable period of development in the population and economy of New South Wales. In the 1830s, transported convicts from the United Kingdom joined an ever-increasing number of free
settlers fleeing the endemic poverty of Ireland and the social upheavals of an industrializing Great Britain. As the practice of transportation was phased out in the 1840s and ended altogether in 1853, New South Wales gradually acquired a reputation as a haven for those wishing to leave behind the difficulties of their homelands and begin a new life under the bright Australian sun. Drawn by cheap land and a perpetual demand for labor – and eventually by the tantalizing promise of gold – tens of thousands of immigrants from every part of the United Kingdom poured into the colony in the early Victorian period.

The waves of immigrants that arrived in New South Wales encountered and contributed to a highly complex composite settler society, where disparate values and local cultures converged and clashed. Like other settler societies founded under the British flag, New South Wales became an intra-British conglomerate of people with various national, religious, class and cultural backgrounds who were voluntarily or otherwise displaced and forced to adapt to a new social and geographic environment. Indeed, such was the volume of migration to the Australian continent that the native-born population of European descent did not outnumber the immigrant population until the final decade of the nineteenth century.3 Owing to the sentencing of criminals to transportation and various government assistance programs in Great Britain, a significant proportion of immigrants that arrived in the first half of the century comprised of poor Irish Catholics; their arrival complicated an otherwise predominately British, Protestant and generally less impoverished colonial social landscape. From the 1830s onward, the

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waves of Irish immigrants arriving in the Australian colony faced particular ideas of what it meant to be Irish. Behaviors perceived as universally Irish by their British-born neighbors collided with their own ideas of class, masculinity and proper social behavior, including notions of legitimate violence. These differing ideas were transplanted through the colonial process and actively imposed in scenes like that of the Sydney storefront in the anecdote above.

The influx of significant numbers of Irish immigrants during this period and their active participation in rituals involving violent behavior offers a unique lens into the formation of an Anglo-Irish settler culture that gradually came to identify itself as a cohesive unit along the notion of whiteness later in the century. In the process of settling New South Wales in the early Victorian period, many Irish appropriated Anglo-Australian notions of ritualized violence to renegotiate their own cultural identity in the context of a predominately British colonial landscape. What resulted was a form of Irishness different from both British prescriptions and what the Irish themselves arrived with. The extrapolation of a regulated masculine pugilism and its role in shaping normative behavior and identity points to a larger historical process involving the emergence of an Irish-Australian settler culture that came to view itself as unique but not drastically different from their Anglo-Australian neighbors, particularly in the context of the emerging global color line perceived by the turn of the century.

The social complexities involved in identity formation in the context of the Irish diaspora to New South Wales is a topic of study frequently underplayed by scholars of Australia and the European migration to the continent. To be sure, the subjects of Irish immigration and cultural preservation have long been addressed by Australian and New
Zealand historians. Russel B. Ward’s arguments for a nascent Irish feeling of exile and alienation framed the debate of what constituted the core of Irish immigrant identity in the late 1950s and 1960s; his research has since been revisited and his generalized conclusions highly criticized, but the idea of transplanted cultural dynamics and the psychological consequences of migration remains a valuable mode of investigation. Historians have corrected and augmented Ward’s work in recent years, most notably by Patrick O’Farrell and Malcolm Campbell since the 1990s. However, the points of negotiation between the salient markers of Irish and British identity deserve more nuanced attention, and the trope of violence in this essay is but one attempt to supplement this line of research.

Additionally, the topic of racial separation and immigration restriction as a means of maintaining a “homogenous” Australia has been dealt with in length by recent literature. Studies of the White Australia federal policies at the turn of the twentieth century maintain a constant presence in the historiography of the Australian colonies, eclipsing some of the complexities of the pre-federal era dealing with emerging ideas of race, identity and belonging worked out among the British and Irish settlers who initially colonized the region. This study does not seek to refute those histories focused on race and the importance of Australia in the global politics of color, but rather aims to

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complement their narratives by providing a lens through which to view racial identity as a continuation of the cultural negotiations that took place in the colonial period.6

The broad geographic region comprising New South Wales offers an ideal anchor for the analysis of violence and identity formation. The obvious reason for this is the importance of the colony to a plurality of Irish immigrants who arrived in Australia in the nineteenth century. As the first British colony established on the continent, New South Wales received the largest proportion of immigrants of all nationalities in the first half of the nineteenth century. The initial waves of Irish arriving to the region from the foundation of Sydney through the 1830s and 40s perpetuated the presence of a sizable Irish minority in the colony throughout the rest of the century. From 1791 to 1891, a third of the nearly 230,000 who immigrated from the Emerald Isle to Australia lived in New South Wales.7

As the final port of call for most transported convicts and free settlers to the continent, many Irish stayed to find work in Sydney and provide a rich source of urban narratives; much of the rest ventured into the surrounding bushland to carve out individual homesteads and small regional communities in a corridor that stretched from Sydney to Melbourne in what became the separate colony of Victoria. Consequently, this study focuses on the areas in and around those two urban centers, as well as the rural communities in the fertile valleys and plains between the cities.

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That this study focuses on the early Victorian period owes to a number of factors. Firstly, the mid-1830s provides a convenient starting point for the significant accumulation of numerous types of publications from which to draw on for source material, including newspapers, travel literature and memoirs. The decades before, during and after the Great Famine of the 1840s in Ireland also witnessed a growth in the number of assisted emigration initiatives sponsored by governments, landlords and charitable organizations; these initiatives produced records that characterized the magnitude and nature of Irish immigration to New South Wales. As the nineteenth century progressed, other events such as the debates over criminal transportation and Catholic education and the gold rushes of the 1850s played an important role in highlighting aspects of a developing Australian colonial identity. Furthermore, the myriad local public events recorded in New South Wales throughout this time, including boxing matches and race-meetings in various parts of the colony, serve to illustrate the pronounced effect of organized and spontaneous violent behavior on Irish cultural consciousness. Finally, this study gestures toward the mining strikes and race riots protesting Asian immigration in the late 1850s and early 1860s, preconditions to the development of White Australia policies upon federation at the turn of the twentieth century. Even in the colonial period, Irish and British immigrants and their descendants focused on the common trope of whiteness with which to construct notions of assimilation and race aimed at excluding the Asian Other.

8 Allaine Cerwonka, Native to the Nation: Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 16.
With these parameters in mind, this essay identifies the spaces in which Irish immigrants were able to renegotiate the negative stereotype of the wild, instinctively violent Irishman in their new antipodean environment, whether by legitimizing their violence through an Anglicized cultural filter or by curbing violence in instances where it was expected. By this process, the Irish minority in New South Wales sought to be regarded as viable and valuable contingent of a new settler society. This process took place in such disparate locations as the race track, the boxing ring and within everyday stories and jokes told in the newspapers and travel accounts of the colony. In these settings, Irish immigrants surveilled their own cultural behaviors in order to accommodate the expectations of a dominant British sensibility. Only gradually were these barriers to assimilation negotiated and surmounted, resulting in an Irish-Australian community that formed successful relationships with Anglo-Australians based on perceived commonality rather than perceived difference.

The first chapter lays a foundation for understanding the Irish arrival to Australia and the ensuing assimilatory difficulties in the context of the early- to mid-nineteenth century Irish diaspora. Tracing the circumstances in which a large number of poor Catholics from the southern counties of Ireland immigrated to New South Wales forms a vital prelude to the examination of cultural dissonance faced by the Irish when settling in the antipodes, and also why violence became an especially targeted trope as consternated British colonists began surveilling the perceived Irish “character.” Chapter 2 focuses on instances of spontaneous pugilism, why it violated the sensibilities of the dominant colonial culture and how the Irish arrivals renegotiated aspects of their culture to accommodate and satisfy these expectations. The final chapter explores locations of
legitimate violence, particularly in the organized sport of boxing (or pugilism, as it was aptly termed), in which Irishmen squared off with their fellow settlers to renegotiate prescriptions of Irishness in the context of an idealized British masculinity, thus gaining respect and acceptance. The essay will conclude by referencing the reaction of Irish-Australians to Chinese immigration in the 1850s and early 1860s that juxtaposes the politics of violence and Otherness and witnesses the successful integration of the Irish on the privileged side of the impending color line.

The ultimate aim of this essay is to posit a bridge of sorts between the two rough historiographical periods that predominate studies of nineteenth century Australian—namely, histories of the transportation era and the fixation on the problem of the “convict stain,” and narratives of the colonies leading up to the White Australian Policy and the accompanying obsession with racial homogeneity. As a cultural history of episodes of immigrant violence, this paper may provide a window into a vital, if understudied, period of identity politics that shaped the development of a uniquely Australian nation. The narratives offered here offer but one location and lens with which to analyze the shifting cultures, behaviors and identities that informed the process that turned colonists into Australians proper, and it is hoped that future research may further clarify the complex junctures through which disparate peoples come together and view each other as similar, familiar and with care, rather than different, alien and no small measure of fear.
CHAPTER 1. THE ARRIVAL OF IRISH IMMIGRANTS AND PRESERVATION OF COLONIAL CULTURES

The settlement of Sydney, first as penal colony in the late eighteenth century and ever after as a cultural and economic center of European–settled Australia, ensured that the colony of New South Wales sported a population heterogeneous in national origin and culture, with Irish Catholics represented strongly from the beginning. Though the First Fleet carried only English settlers and prisoners to Botany Bay in 1788, they were soon joined by the first Irish convicts in 1791. The following decades bore witness to a steady flow of free settlers and transported prisoners from every part of Great Britain and Ireland. This mixed foundational population of New South Wales and the disproportionate representations and patterns of settlement found within form a crucial basis with which to analyze the complicated negotiation of social expectations within the colony by the middle of the century.9

Sydney was founded with a singular, utilitarian purpose for the British Empire. After the loss of the American colonies to independence, the Australian colony of New South Wales was established as an alternative location to deposit the preponderance of Great Britain’s convicted criminals, who were overcrowding the existing jails and prison

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The significant presence of Irish among the relocated criminals helped to ensure the perpetuation of a sizable Irish minority in the colony as the century progressed. By the time transportation to New South Wales ended in 1853, nearly 40,000 Irish convicts had been sent to the colony, amounting to a quarter of the convict population. By mid-century, nearly a fifth of the population of New South Wales was of Irish origin, owing to convicts, emancipated criminals and free settlers.

As significant numbers of Irish prisoners began to arrive from the British Isles in the early nineteenth century, concerns were raised pertaining to the significant presence of Catholics among them. In 1807, Samuel Marsden, an Anglican chaplain who accompanied convicts to the antipodean colonies, wrote that “the number of Catholic convicts is very great in the Settlement, and these in general composed of the lowest class of the Irish nation, who are the most wild, ignorant and savage race that were ever favoured with the light of civilization, men that have been familiar with robberies, murders and every horrid crime from their infancy.” As the colony was then seen as an isolated backwater and dumping ground for unwanted people of all stripes, the transportation of Irish convicts remained a common practice and authorities in Great Britain expressed little concern for the polyglot nature of the people interned there.

As Sydney quickly expanded as an urban center and economic outpost, many convicts were given the chance to work toward an early commutation of their sentences.

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From its inception, the colony experienced a chronic shortage of manpower. Jobs in the colony were plentiful, with employers unable to find free immigrants with which to fill them. As a result, many convicts were recruited to work second jobs in the private sector after fulfilling their daily stint of penal labor. Ironically, in a colony heavily populated by convicts, the opportunity to pull double duty in state-mandated and private work contributed to an overall low rate of serious crimes in the early decades of New South Wales.  

Good behavior and diligent work could earn a prisoner a “ticket of leave” from the governor, releasing him or her with the freedom to purchase land for farming in the bush or to otherwise seek permanent work the developing urban economy. With emancipation, ex-convicts often received forty acres of land in the undeveloped rural areas surrounding Sydney, sometimes more if they were married. In this way, most ex-convicts opted to stay in the colony after serving their time, rather than pay for the expensive trip back to a destitute Ireland that offered little in the way of a hopeful future. In time, the Irish-Australian community would come to appropriate the image of the hardworking and redemptive ex-convict as a centerpiece of their immigrant history.

While Sydney and New South Wales in general were regarded by many in the home islands as a repository for excess criminals, the convict population shrank to marginal status after the opening decades of the colony’s founding. At the height of transportation between 1814 and 1819, 2,954 males and 658 females of convict status were relocated to New South Wales. By 1820 convicts were already outnumbered by the

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15 Ibid, 22; Cerwonka, *Native to the Nation*, 220.
free settlers, soldiers and emancipists that comprised the rest of the 30,000 people in the colony. Catholics comprised a full third of the population, a proportion that remained consistent throughout the first half of the century in large part because of various assistance schemes generated to relocate poor Irish to the antipodes (see below).16

In addition to transported criminals, the early Victorian period witnessed a steady flow of free settlers to New South Wales. Whether because of familial ties or government assistance or both, these men and women defied the cheaper and more typical route to the United States in order to take advantage of the endemic labor shortages of the antipodes. Prior to the 1830s, the majority of the free Irish arrivals consisted of Ulster Protestants, mostly traders, artisans and well-to-do farmers. However, because of the poor southern economy and recurring famine, the 1830s saw unskilled Irish Catholics become the dominant emigrant group departing the island.17

These settlers were often able to create a better life than what their poverty-stricken Ireland could afford them, and while relocation was difficult for families separated and those sentimental to their ancestral homeland, most tenants could not afford not to emigrate. Indeed, landlords and political economists were only too happy to speed away the poor and hungry, and many worked together to enact various assistance schemes to incentivize the voluntary emigration of impoverished and unwanted tenants. As early as the 1820s, influential British commentators such as Thomas Malthus and J.R.

17 Campbell, Ireland’s New Worlds, 7.
McCulloch pushed for state-assisted emigration to America and Australia as a necessary measure for averting famine and unrest in Ireland.\textsuperscript{18}

Assisted passages to the Australian colonies came out of the colonial budget, and their availability was determined by economic circumstances and ethnic and religious preferences. Some colonies, such as South Australia, favored bringing in British Protestants for labor, while Queensland and New South Wales made more money available to Irish Catholics. As James Jupp argues, assisted passages provided a means of populating Australia to instill a “British character” in the colonies, but economic expediency often took precedence and colonies like New South Wales ended up with significantly mixed British and Irish immigrant populations.\textsuperscript{19}

Several forms of assistance were sponsored in the 1830s to fund passage to New South Wales, including loans to individuals or payments to charitable institutions such as orphanages. In the late 1840s the state began offering “nomination” schemes to relatives or friends of those who had previously immigrated to Australia. The most prevalent form of assistance came in the form of “bounties,” or payments issued to shipping agents to recruit much needed labor for the colonies. In this way, assistance was granted to about 3,000 Irish between 1832 and 1938, 25,868 bounties and other emigrants between 1839 and 1845, and 13,328 orphans and otherwise nominated recipients between 1846 and 1850. A further 100,945 were given assistance between 1851 and 1872.\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{20} Fitzpatrick, “Emigration,” 591.
Assisted immigration certainly carried a practical logic, one that provided short-term political solutions and relief for Ireland’s social malaise. However, it had lasting repercussions on the development of Irish immigrant communities in New South Wales, with two in particular that are especially relevant to this essay. Firstly, assisted emigration policies focused on removing thousands of individual paupers to Australia rather than relocating whole family units. Particularly in the case of bounty emigration this meant that predominately single men and only occasionally women skilled in needlework or tailoring were selected for relocation. This targeted form of assistance exacerbated the disproportionality of males to females and individuals to families in New South Wales, a demographic trend already established by the general hesitancy of the British criminal justice system to sentence women to transportation. This meant that a preponderance of Irish Catholic men, usually unmarried and often without any other filial obligation, made the journey to New South Wales in the early Victorian period and constituted the bulk of Irish of the Irish contingent of the population.21

Secondly, the use of assisted emigration as a form of poor relief favored the arrival of impoverished Irish Catholics to the Australian continent at a rate disproportionate to the number of working poor from Great Britain. According to David Fitzpatrick, politicians and social commentators wished to “redirect the existing migratory impulse [in Ireland] in order to maximize the benefit for both Ireland and the empire.”22 Ever since the termination of the Napoleonic Wars, Ireland suffered from falling agricultural exports, poor harvests and bank failures which placed millions in

21 Ibid, 589; Partington, *The Australian Nation*, 24. Partington notes that in 1841 there were twice as many males as females in New South Wales, 87,000 to 43,000, with the disproportion among convicts as being over six to one.

desperation.\textsuperscript{23} Even before the calamity of the Great Famine, Irish immigrants counted for a majority of the assisted free arrivals to New South Wales. Between April 1838 and August 1842, the percentage of bounty immigrants arriving from Ireland reached 63.9% of the total, compared to the 28.2% English and only 9.6% Scottish.\textsuperscript{24}

The Irish were always a minority group in the colony, but the disproportionate numbers of their immigration over non-Irish settlers in the late 1830s and early 1840s became a cause for alarm among some, particularly individuals invested in the idea of an Australia that emulated Britain in its social composition. As Patrick O’Farrell writes, many non-Irish settlers “regarded Irish migrants as twisted an unfitted undesirables, the discarded human refuse of their home society.”\textsuperscript{25} Foremost among these individuals was John Dunmore Lang, a Scottish-born bishop in the Church of England who split his time between British and Australian parishes. An active player in the church politics of the New South Wales and extremely vocal in his anti-Catholic views, Lang considered the growing presence of Irish Catholics in Australia as a danger to the general moral welfare of the British colonies. As assisted immigration gained traction in the mid-1830s, the outspoken clergyman published a tract aimed at convincing Parliament to enact “an immediate and extensive emigration of virtuous and industrious families and individuals from Great Britain and Ireland to the colonial territories,” with the purpose of improving “the moral welfare of the free inhabitants of the Australian colonies.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Malcolm Campbell, \textit{The Kingdom of the Ryans: The Irish in Southwest New South Wales 1816-90} (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999), 24.
\textsuperscript{25} O’Farrell, \textit{The Irish in Australia}, 57.
\textsuperscript{26} John Dunmore Lang, \textit{Transportation and Colonization} (London: A.J. Valpy, 1837), iii-iv.
In Lang’s opinion, the sheer magnitude of the Irish Catholic migration to Australia represented a major cause for anxiety,

“for as the leading Roman Catholics of New South Wales inform us that their communion already comprises not less than one-third of the whole colonial population, and as it is notorious that at least nineteen-twentieths of the Roman Catholics of that colony consist of convicts and emancipated convicts and their children – chiefly from the southern parts of Ireland – it is evident that New South Wales, as a British colony, stands peculiarly in need of a free emigrant population of such a character as to neutralize and counteract, and not to increase and aggravate the tendencies and characteristics of the south of Ireland population.”

One year after publishing his book in the English press, Lang founded The Colonist, a Sydney weekly newspaper that attempted to consolidate the moral “high ground” of Protestant opinion in New South Wales and carried out a strongly anti-Catholic political agenda in its five years of operation.

Lang was not alone in expressing anxious at the considerable presence of Irishmen in the colony. The comments of English traveler John Hood, who published a journal of his wanderings through India and Australia in 1843, reflect a typically despondent view of the demographic situation. Writing after transportation to the colony ended in 1841, Hood nonetheless felt reservations about the waves of Irish arriving through assistance schemes:

“Throughout my wanderings in New South Wales, I have observed that the lower classes are chiefly Irish…the poorest, most useless, and most dissolute part of the population from the southern counties of the Emerald Isle have been exported hither, more as articles of commerce than with a view to the benefit of this country...few of the Irish emigrants land with anything except the clothes on their backs; whereas, from

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27 Ibid, iv-v.
28 The Colonist, January 3, 1838. One of the main concerns voiced by the newspaper was the education debate that took place in the late 1830s over the Catholic education system as a blueprint for the colony. The paper portrayed the conflict as “the Irish system…threatening to overwhelm the colony with a semi-infidel and a semi-popish system of education.” Despite the presence of British Catholics in the colony, the paper’s editors made no effort to decouple the tropes of Catholic and Irish in their attempts to sway opinion.
England and Scotland the generality have a little stock wherewith to commence their colonial career…I shall be borne out by the present state of the populace of New South Wales when I say that the lower Irish character, in some of its worst features, is deeply imprinted upon this colony, and that it would be well for it if the tide of a similar description of its population were to cease to set in here from the shores of Ireland.”29

Hood may have been mistaken in his assessment of the colony’s lower classes as predominantly Irish in composition; evidence collected by historians suggests that the Irish on the whole were no better or worse off than their English, Scottish or Australian-born neighbors. Most Irish engaged in moderately successful farming and many others practiced law, medicine and even obtained political office; one Irish-born ex-soldier, Richard Bourke, served as the governor of New South Wales from 1831 until 1837, before Hood even arrived in the colony.30 Nonetheless, Hood’s English gaze facilitated a perception of the colonial landscape as one filled with miserable Irish paupers, a reflection of the dominate British perceptions of the Irish homeland.

The effect of transportation and assisted passage on the demographic landscape of New South Wales created concern among the colonial government as well. James MacArthur, one of the members of the elite Legislative Council that advised the colonial governor on policy, urged the government to limit the allowed immigration of Irish to prevent their disproportionate arrival to the colony. Qualifying his views by saying that he carried no ill-feeling towards the Irish (“God forbid such a feeling should exist”), and pointing out, with a measure of patronizing honesty, that they possessed skills that made them excellent servants and laborers, MacArthur nonetheless warned his fellow councilmen of the subtle danger of having too many Irishmen in any situation:

“[MacArthur] had many, of all classes, under his management, and he could speak well of the Irish; but he could also bear practical testimony of the inconvenience of a numerical disproportion of one country over the other. An instance of this had occurred at Camden, at an establishment in which it had been usual to employ an equal proportion of English, Irish, and Scotch labourers; but it happened, that the Irish increased in the establishment, and in a boxing match, which occurred, their national pride having taken fire...a general riot ensued, which might have ended in very serious consequences, and it was found necessary to reduce the number of Irishmen back to their due proportion.”

The allusion to the boxing match as an instance of upholding national pride, as well as the Irish propensity to cause violence outside of the confines of the ring, are vital themes that will be continued in the next chapters.

While the voices of Lang, Hood and MacArthur joined others in a chorus that called for the scaling back of both criminal and assisted Irish immigration to New South Wales, it is important to note the language with which these alarmist first-hand perceptions were constructed. Failing to specify exactly what they feared, these men nevertheless cited a peculiarly Irish Catholic character that threatened to permeate and corrupt the otherwise morally Protestant social fabric of New South Wales. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, aspects of immigrant character that were perceived as uniquely Irish became the target of criticism by the non-Irish settler population and informed attempts to curb particular behaviors. Sojourners such as Lang and Hood, who journeyed to the antipodes for long stints but always returned home, boasted of possessing a personal experience of the colonial situation, lending credence to their critiques of immigration policy. They joined Australian abolitionists who, from as early as 1822, fought for the cessation of transportation, citing fears that the Australian

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31 The Australian, September 12, 1842. This particular issue of the newspaper devoted the entirety of the second page spread to the transcription of the Legislative Council, citing the importance of debate over the Immigration Report that had been recently compiled by the colonial authorities, which in turn speaks to the significant attention paid to policy of immigration.
settlers would not otherwise be able to prove the quality of their Britishness in the eyes of those in the metropole who disdained Australia for its convict and Catholic elements.\textsuperscript{32}

However, as dissident voices and political circumstances in Great Britain succeeded in gradually reducing the flow of Irish immigrants to New South Wales in the second half of the century (transportation officially ended in 1842), the Irish Catholic population had already established a significant and lasting presence throughout the entire colony. Aside from the first of the transported convicts to arrive in the colony, newcomers from Ireland did not settle in a single location but rather spread out across the southeastern coastline and plains of New South Wales. Most early immigrants settled in Sydney or the immediate rural areas surrounding the city; however, as the urban population expanded and the colonial governors enabled the sale of vast tracts of bushland for farming and pasturing, the 1830s witnessed an explosion of settlement outside of Sydney and the formation of Irish communities in both urban centers and the rural frontier.\textsuperscript{33}

The unfamiliar antipodean environment produced a general hesitation among newly emancipated and free settlers to strike out into the bush alone. As late as 1849, John Badcock, the secretary of the Colonisation Society in England, remarked at the “great dread” among new immigrants at the idea of heading out into the untamed Australian wilderness. “Men used to ask questions about the blacks and dogs,” Badcock wrote, “and they evidently did not know what Australia was, and it appeared to be the wish of every one as they said to try their luck in Sydney before they went into the

country at all.” The unsettling notion of living amid Aborigines and dingoes was part of a broader reticence to leave civilization and perhaps be de-civilized by the frontier. Edward Wise, an English-born Attorney-General of the colony and contemporary of Badcock, remarked that the general unwillingness of working class immigrants to go into the bush was “partly attributable to the notion that to go into the country is to relapse into a state of barbarism.” Wise singled out the Irish in this observation for their perceived religious and assimilatory desires, describing them as “frightened that they will be entirely out of society, and be unable to go to mass or anything of that kind.”

In reality, Irish arrivals were as likely to leave the city as to stay. The labor market of Sydney proved a boon to thousands of immigrants in its earliest decades, but thousands more took advantage of the opportunity to own land of their own and utilize familiar skills in farming and pasturing that they had utilized in Ireland. Following the precedent set by emancipated convicts in the first decades of British colonization, Irish immigrants followed a pattern of settlement that stretched from Sydney to Melbourne and occupied many points in between. Concentrated Irish communities began to form as Irish landholders, many times ex-convicts, hired out their countrymen to work their land as tenants. As Malcolm Campbell notes, “the concentrated Irish presence ensured that settlers entered into a region in which strong networks of family and kinship existed and where those connections ensured the maintenance of a remarkably confident and assertive rural immigrant community.” As a result, cultural retention remained strongest in the towns that sprang up in the previously undeveloped bushland.

35 Campbell, Ireland’s New Worlds, 78.
Exclusively Irish immigrant communities were not uncommon in the Southern Tablelands between Sydney and Melbourne. The most well-known and documented is that of Boorowa, founded by ex-convicts Ned Ryan and Rodger Corcoran in 1821. From there Ryan presided over an informal “pastoral empire” that was reputed to be as large as the whole of Ireland and from his Galong Castle residence set about engineering a community thoroughly Irish in culture and character and resembling that of a traditional Gaelic tribal kingdom. Similar but much smaller communities sprung up around the same area, such as Yass, Galong and Goulburn.

These communities grew and flourished throughout the first half of the century, and by the time of the Gold Rush exercised considerable influence in the economic landscape of the colony. James Hogan, an esteemed Irish-Australian within literary and religious circles of the Australian colonies, wrote of the pervasive Irish presence in the towns surrounding Geelong and Melbourne, built when immigrants purchased inexpensive plots of land before the administrative sovereignty of Victoria and the gold rushes in the 1850s. Hogan singled out the town of Kildare, a suburb of Geelong, “peopled almost exclusively by Irish carriers and their families” who worked communication and transport between the gold mines and the urban centers on the coast. So to was Kilmore, built in a fertile valley region forty miles north of Melbourne on the main road to Sydney and settled by successful farmers who, “with that generous warm-hearted love of kindred which is one of the finest traits of the Irish character,” sent for their “poor and oppressed relations at home, to share in their prosperity and freedom under southern skies.” Other southern villages took on uniquely Irish names that reflected

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the origin of the inhabitants, such as Kilkenny, Ballinasloe, Dunboyne and the aptly-designated Irishtown.37

These towns established in the bush acted as islands of Irish culture in the developing colonial landscape. Hogan did not exaggerate in saying that Kilmore “became a little Irish colony” in Australia and quoted another traveler in remarking that “It gave me the idea that Tubbercurry had been rafted over holus-bolus from the Emerald Isle, so completely and intensely Irish was the entire population in appearance, in accent, and in the peculiarly Milesian style in which the shops were set out.”38 Indeed, John Hood remarked, with a hint of dissatisfaction, that in numerous locations throughout New South Wales “the traveler would imagine that he was passing through Tipperary, or bonny Kilkenny, so rich and so universal is the brogue.”39

Many Irish entrepreneurs became elite businessmen in the emerging colonial economy. An immigrant by the name of Joseph Kerley virtually owned the entire local carrying trade, while another Irish settler, Micahel Donaghy, founded the largest factory in the colony in 1853. Though not every settler made it rich, on the whole the fifth of the New South Wales population who hailed from Ireland by midcentury were not resigned to unskilled labor but dispersed throughout various fields of employment in similar proportions to other national groups.40 There were some misgivings by others in the colony who distrusted Irish labor. J.O. Balfour, an English settler who wrote of his six years living in Bathurst, professed his preference (and ostensibly that of the rest of the colony) for non-Irish labor. “Although it would be impolitic to make any invidious

40 Hogan, 101-102; Campbell, *Ireland’s New Worlds*, 76, 95.
comparison between the English and Irish immigrants,” Balfour wrote, “it would be
unfair to the English immigrant to pass unnoticed his superiority to the Patlander, who is
generally esteemed so comparatively unsuitable that an immigrant ship from Ireland is
less anxiously looked forward to, and causes less interest, than one from England or
Scotland.” Balfour admitted an exception in his sentiment for the numerous Irishmen
who were employers of labor in the colony; however, he stated starkly that he “would not
hire an Irishman in New South Wales when I could get, even at a little higher wages,
either an Englishman or Scotchman of the same experience.” Writing in the half-decade
after the cessation of transportation, Balfour complained that immigration to New South
Wales “has consisted too much of the worst and lowest class of Irish, shipped
indiscriminately, and huddled off like pigs going to market.”

In general, the Irish diasporic community in New South Wales proved a
significant presence within the emerging settler society in the first half of the nineteenth
century. Although often believed to possess undesirable characteristics on account of
their religion or national origin, the contribution of Irish settlers to the economic
development of the colony made them a grudgingly valuable, if not completely accepted,
contingent of Australian colonial society in the early Victorian period. The next chapter
will discuss in depth one specific characteristic that stood salient in the minds of many
non-Irish settlers. The idea that Irish immigrants carried with them an innate propensity
toward spontaneous violent behavior led other colonists to attempt to surveille such
behavior and promote more sporting forms of pugilism that complied with British

41 J.O. Balfour, A Sketch of New South Wales (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1845), 75-76, 284.
sensibilities, which ultimately proved an important function in the process of a broader acceptance of the Irish-born immigrants into Australian colonial society.
CHAPTER 2. SPONTANEOUS VIOLENCE AND THE REGULATION OF IMMIGRANT BEHAVIORS

The historical record of day-to-day goings on in New South Wales is replete with instances of random violence. This is perhaps an unsurprising phenomenon, given the frontier atmosphere of the colony, the endemic problem of unlawful bushrangers and the shortage of law enforcement personnel to keep the peace, particularly in the years leading up to and during the gold rushes of the 1850s.\(^{42}\) Most incidents that filled the pages of travel literature of the day testify to minor occurrences, often involving petty crimes due to boredom or the consumption of alcohol. In reminiscing of his travels through the colony, the English sojourner Henry William Haygarth recalled one episode that may be considered typical:

I was once riding alone through the bush, on my way to Sydney, and as I approached one of these road-side inns I became sensible of an indescribable sort of scuffling sound, which gradually increased as I came to the entrance, where, like Petruchio, I found "no attendance, no regard, no duty;" but as both man and horse were hungry, I walked in, and soon penetrated the mystery. In an inner apartment some eight or ten men, the whole of the visible inmates of the house, were deeply engaged in a pugilistic melee, apparently without there being any private quarrel in the case, for each individual, without any invidious distinction, was, in sporting phraseology, "pitching into" his nearest neighbour. The owner of the house, upon seeing me, extricated himself from the fray, and tried to accomplish an apology; but I saw that there was little prospect of the restoration of order for some time, so I resumed my journey, speculating whether returning sobriety, or the total extinction of the combatants, would first occur to bring matters to a conclusion.\(^{43}\)

Closer to urban centers, the frequency of violence was even more apparent. Police blotters published in local newspapers testify to the random disturbances prevalent in the colony. One example in an 1853 issue of the *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer* details one John Brown charged with breaching the peace. Brown claimed that he was in town when he witnessed a man “kick a friend of his in the most cowardly manner over the face,” and retaliated by punishing him severely. The mayor of Geelong dismissed the case against Brown, and the original offender received a choice of two months’ imprisonment or a £10 fine.44

These examples help to portray the manner in which violent encounters were framed and discussed, almost always including scrutiny of the way in which the violence was carried out between the parties in question. The cause of the melee and the manner in which it was fought weighed heavily in the minds of the colonial men who judged these affairs. Haygarth conceitedly dismissed the brawl at the roadside bush inn as senseless, a row brought on by drink; John Brown engaged a man after observing the cowardly behavior involved by inflicting a cheap blow. At the beginning of this essay, Constable Moore faced condemnation on both counts: his overaggressive behavior in pushing himself into another man’s dispute and the swiftness with which he brandished a weapon to render his man helpless. The onlookers around him observed the imbalance in the violent situation and acted to correct it, making it a more honorable, equitable and sporting fight.

The Irish immigrants who arrived in the colony found themselves singled out by their nationality when these types of incidents erupted. The reason for this involved age-

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44 *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, January 19, 1853.
old stereotypes attached to the Irish people by Britons who held themselves in somewhat higher esteem. The image of the wild Irishman, given to low intelligence, an overdeveloped taste for alcohol and violent inclinations, pervaded British thought and was successfully transplanted to the Australian colonies. 45 Again, Haygarth provides a glimpse into this predominate mode of thought. In speaking of the bush, the immigrant communities and their homesteads, he recollects:

Ours, I remember, had five or six tenants, nearly all of whom had met with a violent death...Its latest tenant, an Irish emigrant, had met with his death under very painful circumstances. He was one of two fellow-villagers, who had left their native country in the same ship, and reached Australia with their wives and families. They were both steady and industrious, had surmounted their worst hardships, and were beginning to save money, and to rejoice in their dawning prosperity. But this happiness was not to last. Some trifling quarrel arose between them as they were shepherding together, the eternal shillelagh was at hand, and a single blow sent one of the emigrants to the convict's chain, and the other to his last home, in the land which they had sought and learned to love together. 46

Haygarth’s story highlights the ease in which the Irish were thought to be moved to violent behavior, and the shillelagh in this and other examples presented a powerful and ubiquitous symbol of the violence that could be reasonably expected of the Irishman. Such stereotypes were perpetuated in the humor columns of colonial newspapers. For instance, *Bell’s Life in Australia* favored one-line jokes that pilloried Irish intelligence and pugnacity, as in one entitled “The Irishman’s Question:” “After a battle lately between two celebrated pugilists, an Irishman made his way to the chaise, where the one who had lost the battle had been conveyed, and said to him, ‘How are you, my good

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fellow? Can you see at all with the eye that’s knocked out?’” Jokes were also imported from popular publications in England, such as *Punch*:

“A simple-looking Irishman landed on one of the quays at Liverpool, in search of harvest work. A fellow on the quay, thinking to quiz the poor stranger, asked him, ‘How long, Pat, have you broke loose from your father’s cabin? And how do the potatoes eat now?’ The Irish lad, who happened to have a shillelagh in his hand, answered, ‘Oh! They eat very well, jewel, would you like to taste the stalk?’ And knocking down the inquirer, coolly walked off.”

The insistence of negative Irish tropes in the colony was in part a projection of efforts among non-Irish settlers to hold on to their own sense of Britishness. Colonists of British origin, especially those of at least middling social standing, imagined Australia as an extension of Britain and anxiously sought to replicate cultural habits, such as serving tea, playing cricket, going to the races, and, despite the significant presence of Irish settlers in the colonial population, maintaining a racial and social Other in the form of Patty. Indeed, many of the genteel English at this time reacted strongly to being identified as “Australian,” preferring instead an association with the home country; indeed, it was common to employ the term as an insult throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

So too did many Irish wish to maintain cultural links to Ireland and identify with their home country. As John O’Brien notes, the Irish in Australia held onto their heritage with pride and maintained a strong sense of attachment to the cultural, if not the political,

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47 *Bell’s Life in Australia*, January 22, 1848. With exception to its last, each issue of *Bell’s Life in Australia* contained a joke at the Irishman’s expense during the paper’s short run. Other examples can be found in *The Australian*, February 20, 1835 and April 15, 1848, *The Sydney Herald*, November 7, 1831 and January 17, 1833, as well as several others. Even as a significant minority in the colony, jokes at the expense of the Irish were the norm and reflect the predominance of British stereotypical thought in colonial society.

48 *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, May 1, 1852.


50 MacLeod, *Multietnic Australia*, 36.
ideals of Ireland, transplanting traditions of music, dance and even language. When it came to political issues back home, such as the Land War protests and Parnellite agitation for Home Rule, many Irish-Australians were careful to identify their sympathies with Irish suffering, not bona fide political objectives.\(^{51}\)

O’Brien’s argument that the nineteenth century waves of Irish immigrants were determined to maintain a socially inviolable sub-culture in the Australian colonies does not account for the desire on the part of many Irish to assimilate into what he calls the “dominant Anglo-Australian establishment,” or at least efforts to demonstrate loyalty to Great Britain and the crown. For example, as early as 1800, at a time of great suspicion for the Irish and the open support of some for a French invasion of the British Isles, many Irish emancipists in the colony joined the colonial militia to actively demonstrate loyalty to the crown.\(^{52}\) In a similar fashion, instances containing a renegotiation of identity occurred during the peak years of Irish migration to New South Wales by Irishmen who did not seek to remain altogether separate from the predominate Anglo-Australian settler society. Specifically, the trope of spontaneous violence, particularly in the context of public outbursts, became associated with specifically Irish cultural behaviors and were actively regulated by colonists of both British and Irish descent in an effort to conform to predominant colonial sensibilities concerning the boundaries of legitimate violence.

As stated above, the superstructure of British social life was imported to New South Wales and featured prominently in colonial amusement and identity. Sporting

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\(^{52}\) Partington, *The Australian Nation,* 10.
institutions played an especially important role, reinforcing a sense of cohesiveness and solidarity with other Britons around the empire. According to Mike Huggins, “for colonists, sports aided the creation of an imagined imperial community and reinforced a British frame of reference…Those British migrants who continued their interest in sport may have been more likely to still define themselves as British, and so, as in Australia, had less incentive to define identities that included the non-British.”

Among these imported sporting events, the diversion of horse racing, or race-meetings in the colloquial terminology, was an especially early and prominent mainstay. Popular in all parts of Great Britain and Ireland, race-meetings promised a lively event for all, regardless of social standing. The tradition of the Homebush races began in the early years of the colony by governors who wished to provide an element of mirth to the gloomy routine of convict-settled Sydney, and many ex-convicts eventually procured horses of their own to race and own as a symbol of their freedom and social status. As the contemporary sojourner Reverend W. Pridden recalled, “Gay equipages, dashing horses, tandems, and racers are among the favourite exhibitions of the wealth of the emancipist.”

Race-meetings were organized by select groups of well-esteemed community men in Sydney and in the other urban spaces in which they took place. “We were glad to find a numerous and highly respectable body of our fellow townsmen assembled at the rendezvous,” wrote Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer concerning a gathering.

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54 O'Farrell, The Irish in Australia, 123.
55 W. Pridden, Australia, Its History and Present Condition (London: R. Clay, 1843), 239.
to organize races at Goulburn in 1845. A similar account was held by the *Bathurst Free Press* for another assembly: “A meeting of sporting gents took place at Mr. McClouett’s Sportsman’s Arms…to appoint a Committee for the ensuing Bathurst Meet. A good muster of the right sort had assembled, punctual to the time, amongst whom we recognized some of the veteran patrons of the turf.” These meetings were often romanticized in the local press; one Bathurst report detailed the “sporting brotherhood” that sought to bring merriment to the town, a “cozy knot of business-like gents, like the knights of King Arthur’s round table, but intent upon more peaceful pleasures than was the wont of those grim worthies of the age of knight-errantry. Repartee pun and witticism were the order of the day.”

Despite the exclusiveness of the gentlemanly repartee in which they were organized, the race-meetings of the colony gathered all classes of people from the nearby communities, although the weight of one’s purse determined how close one could get to the action. For those spectators unable to afford prime seating, the areas outside the cordoned-off grandstands featured spaces for vendors to sell food and alcohol and provide games like roulette to those locals unable to view the races but eager break the rhythm of their daily routine. The ever-present lure of gambling also attracted many to the meetings, something which confounded Henry Haygarth: “Why [drunkenness and gambling] should prevail, even in middle-class society, in the face of so many sources of healthy recreation, I am at a loss to understand.”

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56 *Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, December 20, 1845.
57 *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, October 29, 1851.
58 Ibid, December 15, 1849.
The inaugural Petersham Races organized on Christmas Day in 1845 presents an ideal window into a typical colonial race-meeting. As an alternative event to the long-standing Homebush races in Sydney, the organizers stratified the event between those with money (and therefore able to appreciate a proper race) and those merely hoping to see something out of the ordinary. The local Sydney weekly sporting newspaper appreciated that “a slight fee was very properly demanded at the outer gate, in order to keep the company select.” With an element of esotericism the paper also noted that “at an early hour straggling parties of pedestrians were to be seen wending their way towards the scene of action, doubtless great numbers of them totally disinterested in the running, but resolved to spend their Christmas ‘in the open,’ calculating upon the usual hubbub of a race course as an additional source of pleasurable excitement to themselves.” Still, the report judged, “everything seemed quite correct, reminding us forcibly of race course demonstrations in Great Britain.”* The delight in the emulation of a proper British race resonates strongly in the paper’s report.

The close press of hundreds or thousands of people under the hot sun and the availability of spirits to anyone willing to pay also made for a combustible atmosphere at the track. To the minds of British colonists, the presence of any number of Irish among the crowd made violence a near inevitability, and indeed there are many accounts in colonial newspapers that detail several incidents of spontaneous violence at race-meetings instigated by Irish. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported such an occurrence at a Homebush meet in 1847. A man named Morrissey was brought before the police court for “creating a disturbance by his violent conduct in wielding a shillelagh, and striking

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60 *Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, January 4, 1845. Emphasis in the original text.
several persons therewith.” Evidence and testimony revealed that the accused wasn’t drunk, but had been quarreling with another man at the track when he began wildly swinging his club and “with all his might he struck several persons in the most cowardly manner, inasmuch as they had at the time the blows were given their backs toward, and therefore had no opportunity of defending themselves.” After a moment’s struggle with authorities, Morrissey brandished his weapon and called for “every --- native in the colony to come on” before he was arrested. He received a fine of five pounds for his behavior.61

Such episodes were not limited to the large races in Sydney or other urban centers. The 1859 Christmas races in the small village of Araluen were beset by similar problems, when a small fight escalated into a full-scale riot. “A more disgusting or disgraceful exhibition we have rarely witnessed,” reported the contributor to Bell’s Life in Sydney. “The fight, seemingly, was got up and sustained by a few lovers of pugilism.” The reported use of waddies, or wooden clubs, among the riotous crowd indicates the likely presence of Irish with shillelaghs.62

Spontaneous violence was not altogether uncommon at such public events; as Wray Vamplew points out, this was not even a peculiarly Irish phenomenon. Any sort of event in early and mid-Victorian England, Ireland and the settler colonies of the empire carried with it a strong potential for crowd disorder wherever large groups of people were present, and race-meetings were particularly potent locations for random acts of

61 The Sydney Morning Herald, May 24, 1847.
62 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle, January 1, 1859.
violence. However, in the minds of Anglo-Australians, Irish propensity for rowdiness and violence, especially when confronted with ample amounts of alcohol, combined to spoil an otherwise proper good time for everyone else at the races. In fact, the anticipation of violence kept many at home who otherwise might have joined in such public events. In the second year of the race track, the March meeting at Petersham suffered a noticeable dip in attendance, as the March races were scheduled to coincide with the seventeenth day of that month: “The advertised Hurdle Race had attracted a good muster on St. Patrick’s Day, though many of our timid cits were not disposed to risk the odds of a shillelagh row, and remained in town.”

It should be noted that, for all the stereotypes of the wild Irishman spoiling for a fight, there is a cultural component to these episodes of spontaneous public violence. As Malcolm Campbell has demonstrated, public events such as fairs and holidays in Ireland could be reasonably expected to involve some form of ritualized violence as a natural component of the festivities, with the Irish faction fight being the most recognized and infamous manifestation. What appeared to the transplanted Irishman to be perfectly expected behavior at a public event was immediately denounced in the antipodes as something “cowardly,” irrational and borderline barbaric.

Indeed, those British sensibilities were genuinely surprised when a race-meeting involving the Irish did not end in raucous violence. On May 13, 1850 the *Goulburn Herald* reported the first race-meeting held in Binalong, near the heavily Irish-populated

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64 *Bell’s Life In Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, March 21, 1846.
town of Boorowa. The immediate area around the track was roped off from the public and there was a large Irish presence in the crowd, which warranted particular notice from the reporter present:

To be admired above all was the thorough spirit of harmony that seemed to pervade every individual, permitting the meeting to pass off without a single disturbance, which, looking at the Tipperarian statistics of the district, was truly marvelous, but so it was, not a shillelagh described a flourish in the atmosphere…Indeed the inhabitants of this rising township deserve the highest credit for the spirited way in which the races were got up, and the peaceable manner in which they were conducted.66

The festive races at Yass in the same year received similar praise and reported no incidents of violence on the part of the spectators. The same publication reported on the colorful flags and emblems on display at the Yass course – among which the emerald green predominated – and the fiddles, flutes, bagpipes and triangles that helped invoke the spirit of the traditional Irish fair, sans clan violence.67 A popular joke that circulated in Australian publications for many years expressed the connection between Irish violence and their cultural celebrations: at Dublin’s Donneybrook Fair, a man struck another in the head with his shillelagh, after which time the doctor’s evidence showed the victim had a thinner cranium than average. However, when the local judge put the usual question to the assailant, the man showed some indignation, replying, “Your Honor, do you think that a man with a skull as thin as that had any right to be at a fair?”68

The public disapproval issued to the Irish instigators of spontaneous violence and the pessimism with which non-Irish colonists informed their expectations of the Irish in social settings both point toward the desire to regulate Irish cultural behavior. However, this did not mean that violence was altogether unwelcome, even discouraged, in by the

67 Ibid, 102.
68 Advocate, March 30, 1927.
predominant social sensibilities in New South Wales. Rather, the segments of non-Irish colonial society, in its desire to uphold perceived pillars of Britishness in the antipodes, sought to regulate pugilism as defined by particular tropes of masculinity, honor and a hardy English civilization. By adhering to the standards governing violence that were constructed by the dominant British settler culture and participating in violence on those ritualized terms, the Irish, quite literally, fought to earn respect from their colonial peers in the decades of greatest Irish immigration to New South Wales.
CHAPTER 3. ORGANIZED VIOLENCE, PUGILISM AND IRISH HEROICS

As a sport, boxing was not a widespread cultural phenomenon in Ireland. In England, however, the “manly art” enjoyed widespread social prominence. In the earliest years of the nineteenth century at the time of intermittent war with France, several prominent men of England upheld pugilism as a vital antidote to national softness in which Englishmen sharpened their combative skills through fair, honorable means in a controlled environment.

The artist and former British army officer John Thomas Barber Beaumont authored a series of essays in England in the early 1800s, arguing that boxing was “useful to promote national courage” because it required “deeds committed in a bold manly way.” A man-to-man fight on equal terms suited the proper combat of Englishmen, unlike “acts of the bravo or assassin, armed with a stiletto in the dark.” William Cobbett, the popular labor pamphleteer and journalist, also published a tract called “In Defense of Boxing” in 1805 in which he argued that boxing was the ideal manner for men to settle disputes while upholding their honor. Indeed, Cobbett held that it was

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69 Patrick O’Farrell, Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1990), 114. Even as late as the mid-1860s, Bell’s Life in Sydney took it as granted that the Irish were peculiarly indisposed to hand-to-hand fighting, as in the February 11, 1865 issue: “We know very well that Irishmen have conscientious objections to the use of the fist.”

70 Adam Chill, “Boundaries of Britishness: Boxing, Minorities, and Identity in Late-Georgian Britain” (PhD diss, Boston College, 2007), 90.
ingrained in the British moral character that the end of a pugilistic bout also ended the argument, preventing further violence.\textsuperscript{71}

After the period of national anxiety that marked the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon’s reign, enthusiasm for boxing waned as the perceived urgency for enduring manliness faded and the moralizing opponents of pugilism gained the upper hand in shaping late Georgian and early Victorian sensibilities.\textsuperscript{72} In the Australian colonies, however, prizefighting remained a popular sporting activity, and played a vital role in shaping colonial culture. As Beaumont and Cobbett suggested, formal acts of pugilism contained powerful forces on the male psyche; this same sentiment is echoed, if much altered, in Kath Woodward’s sociological investigation of pugilism and masculinity: “Boxing is deeply implicated with social structures of gender, race and class, and, especially, with the social and cultural meanings that are accorded to masculinity,” and the sport demonstrates elements of “embodied hegemonic masculinity.”\textsuperscript{73} In early Victorian New South Wales, British working class men utilized the act of pugilism to affirm their place in a valued imperial manhood, and looked for signals that affirmed this effort. One newspaper article excitedly reported a visit in England made by the Princes of Orange to a boxing match held at the School of Arms in London. The “exhibition of the mode of self-defence adopted by the lower classes in this country…exhibited what in the terms used by the fancy are considered splendid specimens of the art.”\textsuperscript{74} So it was when

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 30.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser}, January 24, 1837.
the Prince of Wales attended a fight in 1860. The prince reportedly formed a low opinion of boxing after that event; nevertheless, his mere interest “was warrant that the pastime was fashionable” to colonists looking to the home islands for cultural cues.  

Like racing, cricket and other British activities, the art of boxing was perceived by the colonists as exercising their Britishness and upholding a vital pillar of manliness on the imperial frontier.

As a result, boxing matches provided a frequent topic of colonial news, with fights detailed not only in the regular sporting weeklies but in nearly every newspaper that enjoyed consistent circulation. Prizefights were a common occurrence and much publicized, with many fighters enjoying a quasi-celebrity status based on their reputation and record. Reports of fights were often highly colorful, often times playfully bordering on histrionic. The contest between Tom Sparkes and Tom “The Derwent Slasher” Ryan was thus promoted to the Sydney readers: “We do not recollect any event which has excited so much interest from beginning to end, for many years. No doubt the battle of Waterloo was a great thing in its own way, but the actions of a Wellington or a Buonaparte sank into insignificance before the doings of the above professors of the fistic art.”

Besides prizefights, some matches were organized simply for the sheer entertainment of it, with nothing for a prize but free drinks and a story to tell.

In any case, the stories that covered fights in New South Wales usually contained a mention of the national origins of the combatants, as many immigrants participated in boxing, if not for money than for national pride, as demonstrated in Councilman

75 Empire, June 29, 1860.
76 Bell’s Life in Australia, January 29, 1848.
MacArthur’s anecdote in Chapter 1. A story in *The Australian* details one of the earliest reported prizefights in the colony, “knocked up between R — y, of Irish extraction, and J. C— e, of currency worth 100 dollars.” On the above match being made, both of the men drank each others’ health, shook hands, and wished the best man to win.” The preview mentioned that though J.C. was a well-known amateur of the ring, the Irishman was reported to be a “dangerous customer” but “a good man.” Additionally, his countrymen were sure to be in his corner, as “the Irish part of the fancy are now upon the alert; and lots of blunt will no doubt be sported by the warm-hearted countrymen in favour of their darling boy.”

Strict rules governed pugilistic bouts in the colony, and deviating from them invited ridicule from sporting society. A match held in January 1846 featured a man named O’Haran, an Irish Catholic from Cork, and Ned, a northern Irish Presbyterian, who agreed to meet in Sydney’s dock district to work out a quarrel. The fight resulted from the news of the release of the Repeal movement leader Daniel O’Connell from prison in Ireland, lending the match a national and political element. The fight lasted only two rounds, with O’Haran the “conquering hero” carried off the field by the crowd. However, both men received reproach for the fight, because of the overly-brutal, scrappy and unmanly nature in which the match was carried out. “Such displays are disgraceful to the community amongst whom they appear,” the match report read. “We have given the correct account in order to shame parties from similar scenes. If men fight, let them fight like men of courage and sagacity, and avoid appearing at the scratch like boars of the

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77 *The Australian*, December 15, 1825. Unfortunately, no record of the fight can be found in subsequent issues of the paper, with no word on whether it was fought or called off.
forest, ‘meditating their oblique attack,’ with jaws and paws equally ready for the
counter.”78 This censure delivered upon the Irish fight highlights the rules governing
the idea of proper combat, as handed down by a colonial society attempting to construct a
worthy form of Britishness. As the fight involved two men of Irish origin, the reporter
may have been more inclined to perceive an example of proper pugilism tainted by the
overly-aggressive tendencies of the Irish character.

This is not to say that Irishmen were always portrayed negatively when it came to
pugilistic encounters. In fact, those who successfully performed within the limits of
honorable boxing received great praise and notoriety. Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting
Reviewer ran a series of articles in the fall of 1848 entitled “Sketches of Pugilists,” which
focused on a number of the most celebrated fighters in the colony. Among them was a
man named Dan Donovan, an Irishman from Cork who agreed to give an interview about
his boxing career. Having moved to London at a young age, Donovan made his living by
selling tobacco products while making money on the side as a prizefighter, winning
renown by touring northern England in his early twenties and fighting under the nom de
guerre “The Young Corkonian.” He felled a number of the great English prizefighters in
the mid-1820s with superior speed and strategy, going twenty-six rounds in one fight
before knocking out his opponent without himself receiving a scratch. After retiring he
settled in Sydney, where he resumed his tobacco trade. If not exactly a rags to riches
story, the paper nonetheless called Donovan, retired from fighting at forty-seven, a
“hero” in the community who still inspired aspiring fighters by “giving the belligerents of
Australia the benefit of his handling and nursing tactics in the rope-girded

78 Bell’s Life in Australia, January 4, 1846.
arena…Nothing more remains to be said but that Dan Donovan now exhibits as a tradesman the same civility and straightforwardness which characterized his war-like career.”

The amount of respect given to Donovan in the papers of the Sydney press testifies to a number of things in mid-century New South Wales. His hero status as won through the medium of boxing testifies to the importance of pugilism in the colonies. Additionally, no derogatory judgments are made on account of his Irish origins, and his Irishness, insofar as it relates to his character, plays no role in his story. The fact that Donovan won against the English at their own game – indeed, triumphed in their idealized expression of manly character – provides a critical element of respect in colonial society; not only for Donovan, who achieved near-celebrity status in the sporting pages of the colonial press, but for the Irish community in New South Wales in general.

Another Irish pugilist, known in the colony as Bungarrabbee Jack, provides another, more detailed model of this cultural phenomenon. Despite his youth and inexperience in the ring, success in that public space propelled him beyond stereotypical trappings innate to his national origin to become an exemplar of colonial masculinity and upstanding behavior.

John Horrigan, known as Bungarrabbee Jack for his renowned boxing debut in the town of Bugarrabbee, was described as “a swarthy looking lad from the county of Cork,” just twenty-four years of age when he took on Bill “The Ring” Davis in his second-ever appearance on January 2, 1847. On that day “his appearance in the ring bespoke a confidence which his determined efforts for victory fully justified…In excellent

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79 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer, August 19, 1848.
condition, his well-tanned hide seemed to bid defiance to the ‘orb of day’ and give a favorable impression to his backers.” This favorable if slightly exotic description of the Irishman stands in stark contrast to that of his English antagonist, whom the match report spoke of in unflattering gendered terms: Davis “looked too lady-like for the encounter on the eventful morning, though the length of time which elapsed during the struggle speaks well of his courage and condition.”

Jack was attended by none other than Dan Donovan, who sported the Irish national flag in Jack’s corner, and the paper’s report situated the two as having something of an Irish master/apprentice relationship heading into the fight. The match itself ended up being something of a bore: “a tedious, though perhaps highly scientific affair” of feinting and maneuvering that lasted four hours and twenty-two minutes under the hot Australian sun. Owing perhaps to his effeminate demeanor as perceived by the correspondent, Davis frequently went down when barely grazed or not touched at all, “round after round, to save punishment.” The description of the Englishman in the blow-by-blow account contained highly unflattering comparisons, particularly for a member of his race at the time: his injuries earned him “a lip that would have done credit to a mangled nigger, a nasal ornament of remarkably increased dimensions, and a cockle shell of singular beauty, [which] demonstrated to a nicety the physical prowess of Jack’s ‘flippers.’” The match finally ended in the 188th round, when “Davis, having received an uppercut from his staunch antagonist, retired as usual to earth; but on ‘time’ being called, exhausted nature refused the manly Bungarabbee Jack further assistance.”

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80 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer, January 2, 1847. Emphasis in the original text.
The marathon victory of Bungarabbee Jack is only outshone by the narrative that enshrined his victory. An Irish immigrant, proudly flying his national colors during the match, conquers his English opponent in a fight which, according to the principles of pugilism, saw the latter fighter all but castrated. Davis’ cowardly tactics provided the perfect foil for Jack’s triumph in his ultimate show of prowess and manliness; indeed, the match, and the story detailing it, witnessed Jack stepping into the void of honorable pugilism left vacant by Davis’ capitulation of his assigned role. Afterward, Bungarabbee Jack went on to fight and coach other boxers, even those of English origin; a match report six months after Jack’s victory over Davis places him in the corner of a boxer named Jim Reynolds, an immigrant from London, who squares off with another of Donovan’s projects, Bob Williams, a onetime Liverpudlian. That both Irishmen could maintain such a position to be in the corner of English fighters speaks to the degree of respect afforded men who proved themselves in the arena of ritualized violence and thus produce a legitimate form of “Britishness,” regardless of their national origins.

It should also be noted that nationality and masculinity predominated in these narratives of famous Irish pugilists, much more so than class, or even religion. Though the sharp debates over clerical education made for prominent headlines in the mid-colonial period, the arena of sport identified (and critiqued) Irishmen by their masculine skill in the ring rather than traditional attachments to piety and poverty; in this way, Irish

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81 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer, June 26, 1847.
prizefighters became ambassadors of a new brand of Irishness, one that stood in marked contrast to the longstanding stereotypes of the Irish that held fast in Great Britain.  

Pugilism had its detractors in Australia. Throughout its run in the mid-1830s to 1840, John Dunmore Lang’s *The Colonist* refused to promote such sporting activities like its fellow publications, with the concern being that sport produced immoral behavior: 

“The Colonist are determined to take the high ground. Entertaining…a profound reverence for the authority of the Christian religion, they will not suffer their columns to be polluted with aught that contravenes its pure morality…The admirers of boxing, horseracing, and other favourite species of colonial gambling and dissipation will, of course, find little to gratify their peculiar tastes in the columns of *The Colonist.*”

From a less ecclesiastical standpoint, the long-running Sydney daily paper *Empire* also formed a bulwark against the fistic arts throughout the 1850s. The editors of *Empire* couched pugilism in nationalistic terms, purporting it to be among the more indecent forms of entertainment that a true Briton should avoid, calling it a “brutal exhibition,” a “demoralizing assemblage” and a “degrading practice” second only to the colonial race-meetings and their accompanying social inadequacies:

There is probably no gathering or spectacle on the face of the earth that combines such a large amount of intense depravity as a prize fight. Some horse races might almost compete with it, but at the horse race, there is still a mingling of the more respectable elements of society. The horse race combines all elements; the prize fight drains out all the wickedness, and keeps it by itself in the full intensity of strength. It is double distilled in its rawest and least mixed form. Yet this is a national amusement, a “sport,” a popular show, provided for the gratification of British ruffianism.

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83 *The Colonist*, January 3, 1838.
84 *Empire*, June 25, 1860.
The paper voiced its concern at the possibility of prominent English and
American heavyweights meeting to fight one another in an unprecedented international
match, which would present “an indelible disgrace to the nation, and it might even result
in inoculating America with the same degrading practice of pugilism, which, we were led
to believe, had nearly died out in England.”85 Even as boxing became more popularly
accepted in the English-speaking world in the last years of the nineteenth century and into
the twentieth, pugilism never fully lost the stigma of the effect its violence had on
society, or on individuals who participated and frequently received serious injury or
death. *The Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser* went so far to label pugilism
as “murder” and compared it to “the gladiatorial contests of heathen Rome and the bull-
fights of semi-heathen Spain,” as well as “the fights and scrimmages so common at Irish
fairs in the olden times.”86

However, as with the popularity of the sport in United States in the second half of
the nineteenth century, boxing held onto its public prominence in the Australian colonies
as it failed to do in Great Britain. Some years after the fights detailed above, and some
decades after the marginalization of boxing in England, *Bell’s Life in Sydney and
Sporting Reviewer* ran an article titled “Pugilism and Its Opponents,” which proceeded to
point out the benefits of boxing as well as conduct a comparison between national styles
of fighting to demonstrate English superiority as a result of practicing pugilism. “Those
who have conned our pages for the seven years *Bell’s Life* has had existence,” the paper
wrote, “must have observed the uniformity of our opinions with respect to the manly and

85 Ibid, June 25, 1860.
86 *The Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser*, June 5, 1883.
scientific art of boxing. We looked at prize fights not as mere gladiatorial exhibitions to satisfy the tastes of the low and vicious, or to increase the pecuniary means of sharpers at the expense of the credulous and unwary, but as tending to keep up the national character of Britons.” The paper argued that progress was commensurate with the type of violence practiced by a civilization. “What most disgraces the Irish commonality? Their unfair conduct in a row, and their bloodthirsty spirit when in anger. What, on the contrary, has been the characteristic of the English? Why, fair play, such as Pugilism inculcates - hardihood and bravery, which our youth of ALL classes emulate, and our soldiers and sailors have found of practical advantage in manhood.”

As with perceptions of the art of pugilism itself, defending the act of boxing as a force for social good took on a gendered quality. *Bell’s Life in Australia* took aim at *The Sydney Herald*, call the paper an “imbecile old granny” for entertaining “an inveterate hatred against the noble and scientific art of boxing, which, in our humble opinion, tends to keep up the manly nationality of the Anglo-Saxon race, namely, to defend themselves from oppression with the arms furnished by Nature, rather than resort to the desperate ones constructed by artificial means.” With this masculine and national pride, the writer identified the Mediterranean races as cowardly in their violence: “Let the dissentients prate about ‘disgusting scenes and demoralizing influences,’ but give us the open, fair play of the boxer, and leave the stiletto and the knife to the Italian and the Spaniard.” It is worth noting that this defense of pugilism was merely a digression within a detailed match report between the Englishman Tom Sparkes and Tom Ryan, known as “The Derwent Slasher” and a pupil of Bungarrabbee Jack. Sparkes easily won the fight, but

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87 *Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, February 7, 1852.
Ryan, with his “bright eye” and positive reputation for winning past fights, was granted his due respect and the paper cited the drastic difference in size rather than any perceived masculine or national weakness between the two as the reason for the outcome.88

Unsurprisingly, men predominate in the recorded stories detailing acts of Irish bravery by participating in the celebrated violence that comprised the fistic arts, but the colonial record contains at least one instance of a woman who gained fame for her participation in pugilism. In 1860, Bell’s Life in Sydney ran a story entitled “A True Limerick Girl,” recounting the deeds of a young girl named Margaret McCarthy who “has won distinction in an encounter with a ticket-of-leave returned convict desperado, in which the ruffian came off second best.” McCarthy discovered a recently emancipated convict robbing the room next to the one she rented, and “prevented his escape till succor arrived, by engaging him in several rounds of earnest pugilism, in which knock-down blows were dealt on both sides, but the majority of which fell by poetic justice, and by the Celtic vigor of the heroine’s right arm, to the share of the baffled robber.”89

Described as a “very neat, genteel, and remarkably well-looking woman,” McCarthy received unanimous praise by the barrister, jury and counsel who prosecuted her criminal “opponent,” all of whom “concurred in lauding the gallant behaviour of the young girl, who proved herself a true daughter of Limerick lasses.” The report then cited the role of Limerick women in the historic siege of that city by fighting off Williamite forces and added that when she inevitably finds a husband she will “possess better security against ‘wife-beating’ than the forbearance of her husband,” as well as keep him

88 Bell’s Life in Australia, January 29, 1848.
89 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer, October 6, 1860.
from “swerving from the direct path of connubial rectitude” by the might of her physical prowess. Indeed, in a reference to the traditions of clannish violence accompanying the great Irish fairs, “in the good old days of the faction fights, a Limerick boy would have given a trifle to have such a girl by his side at the great fair of Kilmallock or Bruff.”

Such high praise was not without a shade of gendered particularity and included a nod to McCarthy’s cultural origins, but the paper did acknowledge that such faction fights were a thing of the past and implied that the Irish in the colony possessed a reserve of silent strength that was valued for its own sake.

These accounts of Irish immigrants engaging in violence regulated by British modes of pugilism demonstrate the capacity of British colonists to extend unreserved respect to the Irish who fought to earn it. In the boundaries between cultural differences, Irish pugilists were able to locate a seam with which to unravel the stigma of their own violent stereotypes and appropriate specifically British rituals of violent behavior to renegotiate a shared space in which Irish and British could inhabit common ground regardless of national origin. That the Irish pugilists who engaged their British opponents in the ring typically sported their national emblems and emerald colors is evidence that this effort was an intentional one, meant to reconcile national stigma with a display of victorious masculinity. In this way, Irish pugilists literally fought to reverse the stereotype of the wild, uncontrolled Irishman and to create a new narrative of the manly and equitable Irish that helped to conquer the frontiers of the British Empire.

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90 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

The immigrants from Ireland who participated in pugilistic activity throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century did so by fighting in two simultaneous arenas. By engaging their opponents in regulated, “proper” hand-to-hand combat, Irish immigrants earned the respect of their colonial peers, demonstrating a quality of bravery and hardiness that resonated on a level frequently – exclusively – associated with the characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon race of Great Britain. Additionally, these fights also took place within part of a larger and more complex social struggle that, at least initially, saw the Irish as an unwelcome addition to New South Wales but gradually came to accept them as a valued part of an emerging Australian identity.

In this manner, Irish colonists achieved closer cultural proximity to their British counterparts. However, in an antipodean colonial environment where the very notions driving violent behavior were distinct from those found in the metropole, this preponderance of ritualized violence helped make all colonists, of Irish and British descent, less British and more Australian in culture, and eventually in identity as well. The sporting culture that developed in the Australian colonies took on a nature of its own, and its participants viewed themselves as separate (indeed, superior) to their imperial kin.
in the British Isles, in that Australian sporting men perceived themselves as more hardy and less elitist.\footnote{Ward, \textit{The Australian Legend}, 67; Huggins, \textit{The Victorians and Sport}, 235.}

This process played itself out only gradually, and fragments of a consolidating Australian identity partially based on pugilism can be found with the growing international popularity of the sport within the English-speaking world. The most well-known fighters to visit Australia were the African-Americans Peter Jackson, who won the heavyweight championship of Australia in 1886 and 1892, and Jack Johnson, who defeated Tommy Burns in Sydney in 1908, much to the disdain of racist White Australian supporters.\footnote{Theresa Runstedtler, \textit{Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 10, 53.} Jack “Twin” Sullivan, an Irish-American boxing heavyweight champion, badly beat Bill Squires, a native Australian who represented the new nation in a match in 1907.\footnote{\textit{Australian Town and Country Journal}, October 2, 1907.} Outside of local newspaper reports of individuals and matches. The British sojourner Frank Fowler published a tract on his three years in the colonies, and spoke to his perceived opinion of the Australian character he found there. “He can fight like an Irishman or a Bashi-Bazouk,” Fowler wrote. “Otherwise he is orientally indolent, will swear with a quiet gusto if you push against him in the street, or request him politely to move on.”\footnote{Frank Fowler, \textit{Southern Lights and Shadows: Being Brief Notes of Three Years’ Experience of Social, Literary, and Political Life in Australia} (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co., 1859), 23.} Such a blanket description of the colonists is obviously highly colorful and contrived, but revealing nonetheless. Fowler describes a new people, different altogether from those still living in the British Isles, and uses orientalist imagery, along with the familiar Irish trope of violence, to paint a description.
The convergence of an Australian society forged out of a raw and heterogeneous immigrant environment of course involved more than the impulses and negotiations of pugilism. The prosperity of Irish laborers and farmers throughout the colonies bolstered the reputation and morale of a developing Irish-Australian community. The Irish-Australian politician and onetime premier of Victoria wrote to a friend of the “strange hybrid” of immigrants he met throughout his travels: “an Australian-Irish farmer with the keenness and vigour of a new country infused into his body.” Duffy remarked that his own nationality was irrelevant when it came to his own political business. “I am just returned from my election where they fought for me like lions in the name of the poor old country; and, to do them justice, Protestants as well as Catholics. We have bigots here, but the love of country is a stronger passion than bigotry in the heart of the exile.”

Elements of Irish culture wove their way into the fabric of an emerging Australian identity, and there is no better illustration than the ubiquitous celebration of St. Patrick’s Day in the major urban areas throughout the nineteenth century. If the Petersham Races held on St. Patrick’s Day in 1846 were ill-attended by residents of Sydney afraid of an outburst of Irish violence, a highly-publicized dinner held that evening in honor of the holiday was well received by the elites of the community. The public meeting hall in which the dinner took place was adorned with decorations featuring the Harp of Erin and a full-length portrait of Daniel O’Connell, with the motto “Peace and Reconciliation” above it. The Mayor of Sydney led the proceedings and several toasts were given to the prosperity of Ireland and the Irish in Australia; also made were several remarks at the expense of John Dunmore Lang, who had recently made some disparaging remarks at a

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similarly publicized dinner in Melbourne in comparing the Irish to his own Scottish race.
The report condemned Lang’s opinions and appealed to the harmony that existed in
colony under Victoria’s reign: “What lasting benefit can be derived by pitting the Scot
against the Patlander? The presence of several highly respectable Scotchmen at St.
Patrick’s dinner proves a reciprocity of kind feeling. The frequent intermarriages between
natives of both countries establish the most sacred alliance; the mutual loyalty to one
Sovereign ruler binds together their national interests.”96

A dozen years following this occasion, a great crowd attended a boat race along
the city’s Pyrmont waterside in public celebration of the holiday: “Throughout the whole
day great crowds of persons in holiday attire, of every age and of every sex, studded
every available point whence a view of the sport could be obtained…There were many
booths at the waterside of Pyrmont, and they reaped, generally speaking, a goodly
harvest, being eagerly patronised by those droughty souls who love to drink the health of
Hibernia’s patron saint.” There were “a few shindies towards the end of the sports
amongst…reverering Celts who had partaken too freely of the whiskey,” however, they
posed no problem to the festivities thanks to “the kindly interference of the bystanders, so
that St. Patrick’s day appears to have passed off entirely quite without a single instance of
a regular jolly good Irish row.” After the races ended, many retired to Hunter’s and other
local saloons to drink to the health of the royal family, and to the endurance of the
empire.97

96 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer, March 21, 1846.
97 Ibid, 1858.
The marriage of cultures intertwined with the shifting immigrant environment of the colonies, in which New South Wales and Victoria experienced waves of newcomers drawn by the prospect of gold from the early 1850s. Among these were thousands of Chinese, which caused particular consternation among Australians of both Irish and British origin and descent. With some vocal exceptions, the Irish in New South Wales largely maintained a consistent opposition to Chinese immigration. A popular publication called the *Irish-Australian* was founded in Sydney in 1894 and its first editorial expressed dedication to an “Australia for Australians” platform that targeted the “Chinese and other inferior European races” who “usurped the public market places.” “We shall advocate it on generous lines, offering a hearty welcome to all who would become Australian by unreservedly casting in their lot with us,” said the newspaper. “While doing this, we shall champion the claims of Irish-Australians to perfect essential equality with their fellow citizens.” 98

The language of assimilation is clearly present in this manifesto, with the Irish now standing as gatekeepers to the privilege of acceptance that was dominated by an increasingly sophisticated color line that became engrained in Australian national identity. And though Irish-Australians could begin excluding other people from a land they claimed for themselves, and were largely considered a natural part of the demographic and cultural landscape by the second half of the century, they still had detractors of their own. Perhaps the most prominent figure was that of Sir Henry Parkes, the premier of New South Wales at various times throughout the 1870s and 1880s and

considered the father of Australian federation, opposed Irish Catholic immigration to the colony and actively worked to limit it. Nonetheless, Irish-Australians in the colonies came to regard assimilation as something grounded in race rather than culture, and supported White Australia immigration restrictions at the turn of the century. The Irish were considered a “white” race by the Australian federal government, and were therefore exempt from its draconian policies.

In a bitter twist of irony, violent acts against Chinese workers in the goldfields were legitimized on the grounds of racial difference. Irish-Australians led the anti-Chinese riots at the fields in Lambing Flat in 1861, which lay within a Burrongong district heavily populated by Irish immigrants. Shortly afterward, The Sydney Morning Herald published a lengthy opinion in response to a public meeting in Sydney to discuss the riots and the topic of Chinese immigration in general. During the meeting’s proceedings “everything hostile to that people was cheered…the injuries done to the Chinese by brutal violence were hailed with rapturous laughter.” With no small amount of disgust the Herald article juxtaposed the prejudice toward Chinese with the historical barriers confronted by the Irish in the recent past:

To hate a Chinaman is the fashion. It is not ten years since, in many parts of America, no Irishman could show himself without being insulted. His appearance in any public meeting was a signal for a general assault. The Know-nothing movement in that country was intended to prevent the intrusion of foreigners, and the arguments of that party were precisely the same as those we hear from our mob orators: the foreigners belonged to an inferior race; the dregs of European population were thrown upon the American shores; the institutions of the country were degraded by this influx…But we need not go to American for example of this antipathy. We have seen it several times

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100 Ibid, 21-22; Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, 82.
displayed on this continent...Every scholar knows with what coolness different races according as they succeeded to power have assigned to all others the characteristics of a degraded and inferior race...When we speak of inferior and superior races, if we are to test that superiority by order, by respect to the laws, by industry, or by any other test which it is usual to apply to subjects, we fear the balance would be very far from being struck in our favor.

With a powerful historical comparison sure to resonate with a number of the colony’s inhabitants, the Herald made one more comparison. “No hatred of Chinese could possibly exceed the aversion of the swinish Anglo-Saxon for the fierce Hibernian,” cited the article, with the English always viewing the Irish as alien in language, blood and religion and the Irish repeal speeches that “only require the substitution of the word ‘Chinese’ for ‘English’ to make them available for our local meetings.”

Surely the sobering historical perspective of the Herald gave some of its Irish-Australian readers pause in their prejudices; nevertheless, the process of Othering the Chinese helped to solidify the place of Irish-Australians within the dominant social group, who jealously clung to the privilege of belonging that they refused to extend to Asian newcomers. And increasingly, colonists of Irish origin identified more with Australia and less with Ireland. To be sure, several Irish national organizations were founded throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century – St. Patrick’s societies, Hibernian and Celtic clubs – but membership was never large, and reflected less nostalgia and more novelty for those wishing to commemorate their heritage. Similarly, Fenian violence throughout the empire was roundly denounced by most Irish in Australia, particularly after an assassination attempt on Prince Alfred, the first member of the

102 The Sydney Morning Herald, August 2, 1861.
British royal family to visit the Australian colonies, by an Irishman professing Fenian connections in Sydney on March 11, 1868.¹⁰⁴

Irish-Australians had a significant stake in distancing themselves from any form of unlawful violence – except those forms that were considered acceptable – whether it related to republican extremists or everyday Irish behavior. The prominent Irish-Australian writer James Hogan recorded a dialogue in which he and one of his neighbors discussed a recent a public auction of land to a crowd of Irish immigrants in Victoria. “I was certainly surprised to see the whole assemblage disperse without a drunken man to be seen or a row,” the neighbor said. “Surely Pat is degenerating from the traditions of his ancestors!” Hogan responded by indignantly dismissing the stereotypes of his countrymen and asserting their good behavior:

If by “the traditions of his ancestors” are meant the many doubtful stories of the bacchanalian revels and the quarrelling propensities of Irishmen in a bygone age, then the sons of Hibernia today, all the world over, must be entitled to every commendation for refusing to recognise, as their national model, the reckless, rollicking, contentious, six-bottles-a-day Irishman of exaggerated tradition. The Celts of the great potato-producing district of Victoria are far from being singular in their good behaviour as an assembled body; for, in every part of Australia, Irishmen meet together for business and for pleasure, and afterwards return to their homes in the most sober and peaceable fashion that any honest well-wisher of the race could desire.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Campbell, *Ireland’s New Worlds*, 112-114.
¹⁰⁵ Hogan, *The Irish in Australia*, 122-123.
Hogan’s insistence of the good-natured Celt in the antipodes is portrays an acute awareness of the negative imagery that accompanied Irish migration to the imperial colonies. His eagerness, even anxiety that accompanied his reaction to the expectations of violent behavior prescribed to his countrymen is evidence that an intentional effort had taken place in the minds and actions of Irish-Australians as they fought for acceptance in their new homeland.

The trope of violence was ever present in the minds of Irish-Australians who were conscious of their national reputation and hoped to transcend age-old stereotypes to confirm their place in their new home in the antipodes. Many Irish who arrived with preconceived cultural notions of ritualized violent behavior were reprimanded by dominant British colonial society who surveilled both the Irish and British colonists to urge conformity to normative patterns of behavior as dictated by a desire to exhibit Britishness on the imperial frontier. By taking on British sensibilities on their own terms and engaging in regulated, Anglicized forms of violence that were acceptable, and even encouraged, in the colonial environment, Irish settlers were able to fight for – and win – individual and national respect by displaying a masculinity and physical bravery recognizable to their fellow colonists. In this way, the Irish settlers of the Australian colonies become an accepted and valued contingent within a broader Anglo-Irish coalition that positioned itself across the exclusive, imagined color line that emerged in the twentieth century.
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