THE FAMINE GENERATION

The Middletown Irish in the 1850's

by

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In 1850, Middletown residents gathered to celebrate the bi-
centennial anniversary of the founding of their city. William
Bryan Casey, the son of a wealthy Irish Episcopalian merchant and
mayor of Middletown expressed the sentiments of this class of Middle-
town citizens with his bi-centennial speach. It was with a feeling
of longing and nostalgia that these citizens of Middletown looked
back on her past as a busy seaport with a bright economic future,
to a time when Middletown was still a small city with a sense of
community that was dominated by the town’s wealthiest families.
At a time when America was beginning the industrial development
that would eventually make this nation a leading economic power,
Middletown’s old guard faced the future with a sense of fear and
anxiety.1

The early nineteenth century had brought great changes to Mid-
dletown, changes in the economic vitality of the city and in the
nature of the relations of persons within the community that caused
these citizens to view the future with alarm. The Middletwon that
the famine generation of Irish immigrants would encounter in the
1850’s was quite different from both the early agricultural
society and the later commercially oriented trading port.
Middletown had successfully weathered change in the past as it
experienced the transition from a close knit and isolated agricul-
tural community dominated by the Congregational church into a
thriving West Indies trading port and a center of the New
England coasting trade. The town grew rapidly during the period
from 1730 to 1780, and by 1800 it was the third largest city in
Connecticut, with the presence of a U.S. Customs House as testimony

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1. David Engstrom, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Development of
    Industry in Middletown and Meridan", Honor's Thesis, Wesleyan
    University, Middletown, Ct., 1980.
to the city's economic importance. As the power of the Congregational church waned and the economic importance of mercantile activities grew, the town came to be dominated by a few extremely wealthy merchant families like the Hubbards, the Alsops and the Russels, who intermarried with the cream of Middletown's commercial society and further concentrated their wealth and power. Yet despite the domination of the city by this new mercantile elite who originated outside of Middletown, the economic growth produced by their commercial activities actually helped to preserve the old sense of community by providing economic opportunities for the sons of Middletown's farmers as the city's population grew and the land resources dwindled. When Middletown declined as a seaport after 1810 due to the disruption of trade due to the 1812 was with Great Britain, and then the decline in West Indies trade and the use of larger vessels for commercial trade that could not sail up the shallow Connecticut River, the town experienced a considerable out migration of young men that could find no opportunity for advancement in Middletown's depressed economic situation.

Middletown's wealthier citizens had little reason to invest in industry so long as trade flourished. Investments in Middletown's early industries were largely in textiles and generally failed or did poorly due to competition with British industries. At the time when Middletown began its decline as a seaport, many of the wealthy merchants who had the capital to invest in industrial development were older men who had lost their incentive to

3. Peter Hall, Assistant Professor of History, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct., from 'Middletown Class', 9/20/95.
4. Steven Peretz, "A Demographic Profile of Early 19th century Middletown", Student paper, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct.
try new things, and were probably also wary of the influx of new people that such development would bring, outsiders with no ties to the community, and unlikely to develop such ties in an impersonalized industrial economy. There was also the distinct possibility that such an economy would foster the growth of a new elite that would challenge the dominant position of Middletown's merchant elite. 6

Though Middletown did experience some industrial development in the early 1800's and some marginal growth in the 1830's and 1840's, this was nowhere near the extent of the industrial development that occurred in other Connecticut cities like Meriden and New Haven.

It was not until the 1840's that Middletown citizens began to realize the need for manufacturing to sustain the city's economy. 7 By that time, the decline in Middletown's larger industries such as arms manufactories that declined from the period of the 1830's through the 1850's due to a decrease in government contracts, and the earlier decline of textile mills like Pamachea Manufacturing Company in the 1830's had discouraged Middletown's wealthier citizen's from making the heavy investments in capital and equipment that were necessary for her industries to be competitive. 8 Although the Middletown economy grew during the 1850's, it was due largely to the growth in the number of small, labor intensive industries that could not long survive competition with larger, capital intensive firms. 9

Despite the fact that Middletown did not become an important industrial center during the early 19th century, the city was not immune to the kinds of changes noted by Thomas Bender, 10

8. Ibid., pp. 78-81.
9. Ibid., p. 103.
10. Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change.
Thernstrom, and Paul Johnson and other historians of the era that white of the changes in interpersonal and community relations that occurred as the more impersonalized manufacturing economy developed. The substantial outmigration of Middletown's young men in the early 19th century was accompanied by a substantial increase in the amount of migration into Middletown. In 1810, fully one half of Middletown's population was new citizens. Middletown's once close knit community was fast becoming a city with a large population of transient laborers, people who had few ties to the community and over whom the community had little control except through formal, legal means. The large artisan community that provided jobs for Middletown's young men in a controlled, paternalistic atmosphere during the early 1800's had almost completely dissapeared in the 1830's, either growing into larger establishments or moving to areas with more opportunity for economic growth. The 1830's was also a period characterized by the dramatic concentration of wealth in the hands of Middletown's wealthier citizens. The top 14% of Middletown's wealth holders paid 65% of the city's taxes in 1835, and owned 70% of the value of Middletown houses and 90% of the value of Middletown land.

Middletown's response to the breakdown of the old social order and the close community ties that maintained control over an individual's behavior was the formation of independent organizations designed to provide the same types of control and guidance and to recreate community relations on a smaller scale. The churches born out of the Second Great Awakening in Middletown provided

15. Ibid.
strict moral guidelines directed towards the perfection of the individual and the eventual perfection of society. The Middletown Masons provided an opportunity for the merchants and artisans of Middletown to form a similar close-knit community for their mutual benefit after 1810. The Franklin's and Mechanic's societies served as self-improvement societies for Middletown's industrious and upwardly mobile young men, also providing a sense of community support and mutual aid in structuring their lives in the changing society.

Thus by 1850 Middletown was no longer one tight-knit community sharing the same ideals and values, showing deference to the standards of the wealthy merchant elite, nor was it a fragmented society of individuals, each going his own way, with no sense of community or community values. Middletown of 1850 represented a collection of many close-knit communities and social groupings, each with its own set of slightly different goals and principals. As Middletown had diversified economically and a person's ability to accumulate wealth and his own individual accomplishments had a greater effect on his social standing than his family's social position, the city also became more diverse socially. For some of Middletown's citizens, this change was welcomed, as they had more opportunity for personal freedom and mobility than ever before. But for other groups, such as the descendants of Middletown's mercantile elite, such changes signaled the end of an era of social and economic domination of the town. By the 1840's they were aware of their past mistakes and their loss of control over the city's social and economic situation, and had reason to express fear of the future on their Bi-Centennial anniversary.

17. Darryl Wilder, "Middletown Masons", Student paper, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct.
18. Patricia Keenan, "Working Men's Societies in Middletown, Ct.", Student paper, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct.
Some of the changes Middletown had experience in the early 19th century would prove of substantial benefit to a new community in Middletown in the 1850's. In the late 1840's and the 1850's the poor of Ireland flocked to America to escape the potato blight and years of oppression and Protestant domination by the British government. A good number of these Irish immigrants made their way to Middletown, probably due largely to the large laboring force employed across the river in the Portland quarries. While the Irish were not exactly welcomed with open arms by the Middletown natives, for various reasons they did not experience the kind of nativist attacks here that their fellow Irishmen encountered in other New England cities. This was largely due to the fact that many American cities were flooded with Irish immigrants, while in Middletown their numbers were nowhere near as great. They comprised only 18.3% of the population in 1850, and therefore did not present as much of a threat to community values as they did elsewhere. Besides this great difference in the size of the Irish population, there were also local factors at work that made the community's acceptance of the Irish a bit less difficult than it was elsewhere.

There had been a few Irish in Middletown before 1845, but prior to the potato famine most of those that left the country were people that were fairly well to do, middle class artisans and farmers who saw their opportunities constricting due to competition with more efficient large farming estates and Parliament's severe regulations on the growth of Irish industry. These were people who were used to having some standing in the community, ambitious men who sought out areas with opportunities for advancement.

Many were also Protestants from Northern Ireland who had been in a more favorable economic position under British rule. Not that many Irish came to New England before the famine years, and at the time of the American Revolution they were only 2.9% of New England's population. In 1743 the laws protecting Catholics in Connecticut were stricken, and most of those Catholics that remained here chose to erase their religious past. A few of these Irish Protestants became important men in Middletown society, among them Arthur Magill, a wealthy cloth merchant from Northern Ireland who was also a prominent man in the U.S. Bank, and James Casey, another prominent Episcopalian Irishman and Middletown merchant, whose son, William Eryan Casey, became mayor of Middletown in the 1850's. Prejudice against the Irish in Connecticut was more a religious prejudice than an ethnic one, and Protestants and Irish Protestants intermarried fairly often.

The post-famine Irish immigration differed radically from this earlier group that was in many cases able to assimilate into the New England population. The post-famine Irish were poor, Catholic farmers fleeing desperate economic conditions in Ireland. These were unskilled laborers, with little or no education, and crude country manners, who concentrated in Northern cities largely because they were too poor to go elsewhere. It was their poverty, their strange mannerisms, their fondness for strong drink, but most importantly the sheer numbers of them that congregated in such a short time into city slums that caused such concern among New England natives. In the 1850's, the population of many of Connecticut's industrial cities increased quite rapidly. This did not happen

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in Middletown. From 1850 to 1860, Middletown's population grew by only 189 persons. Despite the fact that a large number of Irish immigrants had moved to the city, they comprised less than 20% of the population during this period, and were thus much less of a threat to the Anglo-Protestant community than in areas where they appeared in large numbers. 27 They also most likely replaced many of the native New England floaters that Middletown had seen in large numbers since 1810, as the population rose very little despite the Irish immigration during this period.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of the Irish lived in family situations may also have been of some comfort to New England natives that were accustomed to a paternalistic society where heads of households were considered responsible for the conduct of their family members. About 20.7% of the Irish listed on the 1850 Census lived with Connecticut families, probably as servant in most cases and occasionally as laborers or apprentices, under the supervision of an artisan. Another 60% of Middletown's Irish population lived in Irish families scattered in many areas of the city. Thus there were only 20% of Middletown's Irish population outside the control of a family environment, and of these a substantial number boarded with other Irish families. Although there were several large boarding houses and hotels that were filled predominantly with single Irish men, their numbers were not large enough to threaten the security of the native community. 28

The construction of Saint John's Church in 1842 to provide

24. Ibid., p. 10.
religious instruction for the large numbers of Irish men working in the Portland quarries was important to the growth of the Irish community in Middletown.²⁹ Irish Catholicism was a constant source of hostility and violence between the Irish and their British rulers, and they did not take their right to practice the religion of their choice lightly. Moreover, the church provided a focus for the Irish community's religious and ethnic identity in a Protestant society. The Irish, being permanent immigrants, also used their religious organizations as aids to acculturation much more effectively than many other immigrant groups like the Italians. This is not to say that the Irish attempted to deny their ethnic heritage, but rather that they considered themselves Irish Americans; and used their churches and particularly their parochial schools, both to preserve Irish religious and ethnic identity and to help the Irish community accumulate some of the skills and values they needed if they wished to become upwardly mobile in American society.³⁰ Thus the building of Saint John's Church was made possible to a large extent by donations from Middletown's old mercantile elite. Land for the church was willed to the church by Henry Dekoven in 1841, and the will was executed by Samuel Russell (Russell Manufacturing Company along with the William Douglas Company produced 51% of Middletown's manufacturing output in 1850³²) and Margaret Dekoven.³³ Land was also donated by Charles Richard Alsop, mayor of Middletown in 1845 and a leading organizer in the construction of a railroad spur between Middletown and Berlin

³⁰. Marche Milano, "Irish and Italian Catholicism in America", paper for an American Studies Tutorial, with Professor David Swift, Wesleyan University.
³¹. Edward McKenna, Centennial Booklet and Program of Exercises, Saint John's Church, Middletown, Ct., 1942.
³². Engstrom, op. cit., p. 100.
³⁴. Casey Blake, The Irish Immigrants in Middletown, Ct. 1830-60, Student paper, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct.
in the 1850's, and a $500 donation by Mrs. Richard Alsop helped to get construction under way. The Middletown loaned the pastor of the church, Father Brady, over $1000 to cover the cost of the construction of the first church. When this church proved too small for the numbers of Irish that came to Middletown in the late 1840's, a new church was built in 1852, with stone donated by the owners of the Portland quarries. Middletown's old merchant elite, conscious of their declining influence in the community, and by the 1840's also aware of the need for industrial development and the building of a railroad to provide year-round transportation to and from the city, joined with the Portland quarry owners in the construction of a community church that could do much to provide stability for Middletown's Irish population.

Middletown's political parties, particularly the Whig party to which many of Middletown's commercial elite belonged, canvassed the Portland quarries in the 1840's, and appealed to the new Irish voters as a group with a specific ethnic identity and common interests. The Middletown Constitution, the local Whig paper, while prone to printing jokes and stories about Irish drunks, also printed frequent news items about social and political conditions in Ireland, that were completely sympathetic to the Irish cause. This acknowledgment of the Irish in Middletown as a distinct and legitimate community with its own special needs and interests, coming from some of Middletown's wealthiest families, probably helped to lessen any fears the Protestant community may have had about the arrival of Middletown's first immigrant group.

36. McKenna, op. cit., p. 22.
37. Blake, op. cit., p. 5.
38. Middletown Constitution, January 15, 1851, and June 11, 1851. Also frequent references to the Irish situation in "Western". From Foreign Places" column.
the commercial families of Middletown may have hoped to gain the
loyalty of the Irish community through their generosity, no such
thing occurred. A year after the new Saint John's was built with
stone donated from the Portland quarry owners the Irish in the quarries
struck for better wages. The Middletown old guard may have hoped
for a stable Irish community to grow up around Saint John's, providing
a steady supply of reliable cheap labor for the hoped for expansion
of Middletown's industrial economy, but in reality the Irish
population was very transient, and the Irish population of Middle-
town was constantly being replaced by Irish from other areas that
had no such loyalties to their generous benefactors.

Most of the members of the Middletown Irish community in 1850
(60%) came here with their families. The average family size (mar-
rried couples with dependents only) was quite small, only 4.4, and
the average age of the head of household was 38.5, figures that would
appear consistent with the Irish experience during the famine years.
People most likely postponed having children or married late, and
many couples probably lost their children to malnutrition and
disease. There were 153 single Irish men in Middletown (19% of the
Irish population) and 169 single women (21% of the Irish population),
and a substantial number of those that did not live in households
with native Yankees boarded with Irish families. Thus one of the
characteristics of Middletown's Irish population in 1850 was that
they lived in the relatively stable atmosphere of a family setting.

Another striking characteristic of Middletown's Irish popula-
tion was that most of the male wage earners in 1850 (female wage
earners were not listed on the 1850 Middletown Census) were laborers.

41. Ibid., Seventh Schedule.
Of an estimated adult male work force of 283, approximately 60% were laborers. Laboring jobs in the 19th century were generally short and casual. No skills were required of the employee and the employer was free to let him go at any time. The laborer was generally out of work for at least part of the year, often during the winter, and generally worked long hours for low pay. In Steven Ternstrom's study of Newberryport, he found that wage rates for laborers at mid-century ranged from 75¢ to $1.33 per day, depending on the seasonal demand for labor. The highly transient nature of the American laboring population during this period tended to keep wage rates similar from city to city within the region, so these figures are probably indicative of Middletown's wage rates for laborers. Thus, a good percentage of Middletown's Irish laboring population were barely able to provide the necessities of life for their families, and as was the case in Newberryport, during the off season quite a few families were probably forced to ask for public assistance or for help from the church to survive the winter, as was the case in Newberryport.

Although women are not listed as having occupations on the 1850 Census, on the 1860 Census they comprise 80.4% of all the domestic servants in Middletown, and it is likely that a similar percentage of Irish women were forced by economic necessity in 1850 to find work outside the home. While the wives of Middletown's Irish laborers probably contributed to their family incomes, I

43. Derived from figures in Blake, p. 8. He counted 723 Irish in Middletown in 1850, and 21.1% of the total Irish population were laborers, or 155 people. His head count is 69 less than mine, so I adjusted this figure by assuming that 21.1% of those 69 would have been laborers, or another 15 people, for 170 total laborers, which is 60% of the total Irish work force of 283.
44. Ternstrom, op. cit., p. 18.
45. Ibid., p. 20.
46. Ibid., p. 25.
47. Blake, op. cit., p. 20.
found no evidence on the 1850 Census to indicate that the Irish sent their children to work in any numbers. While the 1860 Census shows that approximately 60% of Middletown's child factory laborers were Irish born or the children of Irish immigrants, the number of child laborers employed in Middletown factories was so negligible (1% of Middletown's population) that the number of children involved would have been only about 30.

Middletown Irish employed in the skilled building trades (carpenters, stonecutters, masons, moulders, joiners, housepainters) account for about 15.2% of Middletown's Irish wage earners. Another 17% or so were employed as small shopkeepers. While this group is often referred to as having the best chance of upward mobility (accumulating property, sending their children to school) of any the nonmanual workers, I could find no evidence of such upward mobility for this group. Only 5 of the 49 small Irish shopkeepers listed on the 1850 Census appear six months later on the Middletown City Tax List as owning any property at all. It appears quite possible that the majority of Middletown's small Irish shopkeepers ran marginal enterprises, renting store space and possessing such small inventories, they escaped the notice of the town tax collector. There is also the possibility that opportunities for small businessmen in Middletown were so limited that few stayed for any length of time. In either case, the possession of even a small amount of investable capital set those shopkeepers apart from the majority of Middletown's Irish population. The skilled laborers were also

47. Blake, op. cit., p. 20.
49. Blake, op. cit., p. 20.
50. Ibid, p. 20, with same adjustments to figures as above.
51. Ibid, p. 22.
52. Middletown City Tax List, Town Clerks Office, Middletown, Ct.
substantially better off than the majority of unskilled laborers, earning from 1.3 to 1.7 times what the average day laborer earned.\textsuperscript{53} Yet, according to Thernstrom's Newberryport study, this higher wage rate did not provide for much luxury, and generally meant that the wage earner was simply able to provide the necessities of life for his family and his wife and children were under much less pressure to go to work than was the case for the unskilled worker's family.\textsuperscript{54}

Many of Middletown's Irish families managed to achieve a more favorable economic situation by taking in boarders and/or by having more than one source of income per family. Approximately 34\% of the Irish families in Middletown took in one or more Irish boarders, and another 20\% had more than one source of income from male members of the extended family that lived in the household.\textsuperscript{55} But by far the most common method of dealing with this depressing economic situation was to move. Of the 792 Irish persons listed on the 1850 Middletown City Census, only 71, or 9\%, were listed on the 1860 Census. The figures for the town of Middletown were even worse, as only 3\% stayed from 1850 to 1860.\textsuperscript{69} Although the number of native born families with children born in several different states listed on the 1860 Census would indicate that the laboring population was on the whole very mobile during this period, the figures for the Middletown Irish still represent an extreme case of transiency.

A number of factors may have contributed to the transiency of the Irish in Middletown during this period. The Middletown Irish community was undoubtedly closely tied to the quarries in Portland. Although there are no listings for quarry laborers of the 1850 Census, in 1860 when such detailed occupational listings do occur, 36.5\%

\textsuperscript{53} Thernstrom, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 92.
\textsuperscript{55} U.S. Bureau of the Census, \textit{op. cit.}, Seventh Schedule.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., Seventh and Eighth Schedules.
of Middletown's unskilled Irish laborers were listed as working in the quarries. There were also 20 Irish stonecutters living in Middletown in 1850, which was probably more than the Middletown construction industry could support, indicating that a number of these skilled tradesmen probably worked across the river in Portland. References from quarry records also indicate that a substantial number of Irish from Middletown were ferried across the river each day to work. The probable close ties between the Middletown Irish and the Portland quarries may explain part of Middletown's high transiency figures. In 1853 there was a bitter strike between the quarry owners and the Irish laborers, who were demanding higher wages. The relations between the two groups were so poor that when the owners refused to yeild, 100 Irish workers left the quarries. Such dissatisfaction with the laboring situation in the quarries may have encouraged a number of Irish to look for work elsewhere.

The Middletown economy experienced substantial growth in the 1850's, but almost all of this increase was due to an increasing number of small, labor intensive firms that relied on skilled and semi-skilled labor. Such firms were not likely to employ a large number of unskilled laborers, and working in such close conditions with a Protestant owner of English descent would not exactly be an ideal situation for an Irish Catholic. The number of jobs for unskilled laborers actually dropped from 1850 to 1860. The number of Irish employed in skilled trades in the construction industry was also down during this period by almost 10%. While this loss of job opportunities may have been made up to some extent by a small increase in the number of factory

58. Conversation with Paul Loether, Associate Director of Middletown Preservation Trust, Middletown, Ct.
59. Middletown Constitution, June 22, 1853.
60. Engstrom, op. cit., p. 103.
61. Derived from Blake, p. 3. 155 Irish laborers were 68% of Middletown's labor force, so there were 288 laborer out of 421 Middletown residents, or 54%. Same calculation for 1860.
jobs, the Middletown economy of the 1850's did not provide either much opportunity for upward mobility or much choice of employers. Despite the fact that the Middletown Irish appear to have been treated comparatively well by the Middletown community and had a church and a parochial school that could have provided a focus for the local Irish community, Middletown in the 1850's developed no sizable stable Irish population. The reasons for this were probably largely economic. Other cities in Connecticut and New England had experienced much more industrial growth by 1860 and could provide a greater variety of jobs and employers for unskilled laborers. 63

An examination of the 71 Irish persons that remained in Middletown from 1850-1860 indicates that those who remained were generally those whose mobility was for some reason restricted. Of the 21 families that remained, six families owned at least part of a house. 64 Fourteen families were listed on the 1860 Census as having children under 10, a factor that would make mobility difficult. Two other families had household heads that got better jobs from 1850 to 1860, and another two families were persons over 60. Of the 5 single women that stayed, all were listed on the 1860 Census as servants in the houses of Connecticut natives. Due to the fact that some single Irish women probably married but are untraceable on the 1860 Census due to their changed names, the number of single Irish women that remained is probably somewhat higher. Of the seven single men that remained from 1850 to 1860, 4 married and had small children, two bought real estate, and one was listed as a servant in the home of a Connecticut resident. 65 The two most

65. Ibid., Eighth Schedule.
common reasons for remaining in Middletown appear to be, restricted mobility due to small children and real estate ownership.

Despite the dim economic picture for the Middletown Irish that has so far been presented, some Middletown Irish did manage to accumulate property, and a few were very successful. In 1850, The Irish population of Middletown, which was 18.8% of Middletown's population, owned only 4.7% of Middletown's wealth and 2.4% of Middletown's real estate.\(^66\) The Irish were conspicuously absent from the 1850 Middletown City Tax List, with only 33 Irish listings. Of these, 16 persons owned nothing. Of the 17 persons that owned taxable property, 13 owned at least half a house, indicating that real property was the favored investment for those Middletown Irish that could accumulate any capital. Of the four persons who had taxable property, but did not own real estate, all invested in savings accounts or bank stock, and all were over 55 years of age.

The few Irishmen that managed to attain a high level of success in Middletown were either businessmen or small storekeepers. Charles Brewer, a jeweler, was listed on the 1850 tax list as owning five houses, four stores with substantial inventories. As he is also listed on the 1835 tax list, he was a resident of Middletown for a number of years, and as an earlier immigrant might have been a man of some means when he arrived in America.\(^67\) Jonathan Kilbourne, listed on the 1850 City Taxi List as owning over $6000 of property, was a hotel keeper. He is also an earlier immigrant, though probably more of a self made man than Mr. Brewer, as he is listed on the 1835 Tax List as owning a store,\(^68\) and was identified


\(^{67}\) Middletown City Taxi List, 1835 and 1850, Town Clerks Office, Middletown, Ct.

\(^{68}\) *Ibid.*, 1835.
from newspaper ads as a grocer and a part time teamster. William J. Gilbert, a merchant and taylor who owned a house worth $1600 and had $100 invested in trade, was also a longtime Middletown resident, and is listed on the 1835 Tax List as paying 90¢ in taxes. John L Smith, a silversmith, owned a house and a store worth $3800, and had $2500 invested in manufacturing. Mr. Smith also appears on the 1835 Tax List as a home owner. All of these successful Middletown Irishmen were from the earlier immigration, and may have been Protestant and/or men with either some capital or a marketable trade when they arrived.

There were some Irish laborers that managed to attain some success in Middletown in the form of ownership of their own homes. Of the 19 Irish people I found listed on the 1850 and 1858 Middletown City Tax Lists as owning real estate, nine were laborers. Thus, it was possible for even the lowest group of Irish workers to achieve some mobility even in Middletown's stagnant economy, although this was not yet by any means a common occurrence.

The majority of the Irish of the famine years never stayed in Middletown long enough to form anything but a very loose sense of community, probably centered around the church. There appears to be no evidence of any Nativist attacks of the kind that occurred in Boston and New York City against Middletown's Irish population though the jokes and stories about the Irish in the Whig newspaper indicate that they were alternately laughed at and sympathized with, wooed as a source of cheap labor and regarded with comic disdain. Middletown in 1850 was already a city of many factions, and the Irish immigrants, because of their small numbers, were able to make a place for themselves. 69 *Middletown Class*, class tax list project, October, 1980.
as one of the many groups with differing ideas and values in the city. Although still on the lowest rung of the social scale, some of the older residents of the community were able to attain a considerable amount of financial success, and a few of the laborers were able to rise into the ranks of property owners. Middletown had adjusted to the changes of the early 19th century, and was able to adjust to the new Irish population. But as a second rate industrial power, Middletown could never provide the wide range of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs that could attract overwhelming numbers of any new immigrant groups. The Irish of the famine years were but the first of a series of immigrant groups that would make a place for themselves in Middletown, and are reflected in the ethnic diversity that can be seen in the city today.
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