

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Varied Hues of Green	20
2. Digging Lumps of Gold	43
3. Mirages in the Desert	99
4. Mollies in the Mountains	131
5. In Search of Respect	166
6. Oro y cobre, Gold and Copper	194
Conclusion	229
<i>Appendix 1: Irish Poems, Songs, and Notes about Mining</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Appendix 2: Transcript of Official Oath of the State of Nevada</i>	<i>263</i>
<i>Appendix 3: Parentage Percentages and Figures, American West</i>	<i>265</i>
Notes	267
Bibliography	329
Index	353

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## Introduction

*Fuaireas-sa litir ó bhrathair gaoil,  
Dul go tapaidh anon thar toinn,  
Go raibh ór go flúirseach le fáil anso,  
Is ná feicfinnse choíche lá cruaigh ná bocht.  
I got a letter from a relation  
Telling me to hasten across the sea,  
That gold was to be found in plenty there  
And that I'd never have a hard day or a poor one again.<sup>1</sup>*

“The only place in Ireland where a man can make a fortune is in America.”<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1883, a troupe of twenty-one made a prospecting expedition to Baja California from the mining town of Tombstone, Arizona. This was perhaps the largest effort of its kind and included local experts such as Bill Hogan. The expedition members were blessed with a rumor that a dying Mexican's last breath told them the specific location of a great fortune or gifted them a map, depending on the version of the story one read. The fact

that the expedition failed is unsurprising; many did, and for many different reasons. What is surprising is that the leader of the group, described by an Indian agent and newspaper editor as someone whose “energetic, courageous, and self-sacrificing life was an inspiration on a wide frontier during half a century” and who was of “frank manner . . . self-reliant spirit, [and who had an] emphatic and fascinating Celtic brogue,” was a woman—Nellie Cashman.<sup>3</sup>

The image of a foreign woman leading a mining expedition challenges some preconceived notions of a stereotypical miner. If asked to imagine the stereotype, people would likely envision a man panning gold from a river. The overwhelming majority of miners in nineteenth-century America were men, were foreign-born or second-generation Americans, lived in towns rather than in isolated rural areas, and were likely to be Irish. These generalizations do not tell the whole story in the knotted and complex history of how the many different people and groups interacted with each other.

Mining was foundational for the industrialization of the United States and the emerging Irish-American identity. The opportunity to acquire wealth prompted one of the largest migrations in American history, the California Gold Rush, in turn spurring the settlement of the West with the possibility of employment and thereby solidifying US territoriality. It continued to change vast regions through settlement and development, not least by its transformation of the landscape that only vaguely hints at the innumerable miles of tunnels dug underground. Many in the emerging workforce were Irish who marched each year in St. Patrick's Day parades as a demonstration of their identity and as a message to wider society of their communal strength. They built and supported Catholic schools, hospitals, and churches staffed with compatriot clergy and other religious workers; sponsored nationalist causes; repatriated vast sums of money to relatives in Ireland; and carved out a place for themselves in the emerging urban West. Their communities were oft-maligned with nicknames such as Poisonville or were referred to as a “black beating heart” by those who viewed the ideal of American western society as pastoral, Protestant, and native-born.<sup>4</sup> These towns represented a vital local market for goods and services, especially agriculture; as Charles Dickens wrote, “It would be hard to keep your model republics without them, for who else would dig, and delve, and drudge.”<sup>5</sup> His observation held true across the American West where the greatest engine of change—mining—established the urban frontier, prompting the rapid

expansion of rail networks across the vast landscape and through the formidable terrain of the Rockies, further propelling demographic changes.

To fully comprehend the ways the American West changed, it is necessary to look at the varied ethnic makeup of this landscape during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Irish constituted a unique and vital element of that workforce, and their experiences are littered across a diverse range of surviving sources. We should look beyond the cities of New York, Boston, and indeed Butte in our efforts to craft a fuller appreciation of the varied experiences of Irish-Americans. An occupational survey enables us to closely investigate these mining towns across a broad area where we can compare and contrast the events and show how they intersect. Historians have long acknowledged a distinctive Irish culture in America. Using hundreds of letters, Kerby Miller's pioneering *Emigrants and Exiles* details the distinctive experience of the Irish in the United States. More recently, David Emmons's *Beyond the American Pale* goes a step further than Miller's argument that this separation from the dominant Protestant culture put the Irish at a disadvantage in the real and imagined American West.<sup>6</sup> His work builds on and challenges both of these views, arguing that Irish Catholicism could be both a blessing and a curse, defined both inside and outside the group. It was a blessing in that it could allow immigrants to retain their cherished beliefs notwithstanding their mobility, empower them to face down adversaries, and enable the repeated creation of community in spite of the boom and bust nature of mining towns. It was a curse in that it could isolate them from others, including possible allies; render them susceptible to targeted attacks from opponents; and expose them to claims of disloyalty to the United States and to Anglo-American society. The chapters in this book build on those earlier explorations and find that the stability and conflict that defined the mining regions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were most often shaped by the Irish presence and the varied groups that supported or opposed them. Beyond letters, newspapers, and records, the testimony of their lives shows how they elected to retain their Irishness and moreover how they determined to reshape their world and influence it, crafting it into Irish-America. By extension, it was encounters with others that formed the lens through which we can see and understand the ethnic dimensions of workplace relations and business frameworks expressed in the invisible social contract.

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To scratch the surface of an Irish miner's life is to reveal the multilayered complexity of their identity. Nellie Cashman's family fled her home in Midleton, Cork, at the outset of the Great Famine. She grew up in Boston and went west over the Panama crossing to San Francisco before leaving the city with her mother to work in Virginia City and Pioche, Nevada; Tucson, Arizona; and a number of other infamous boomtowns. Together, they worked in boardinghouses before establishing their own in Pioche. In 1872 the state mineralogist reported to the state senate that Pioche "scarcely ever had a parallel [for] lawlessness and horrid murders, which have scarcely ever had a parallel in the history of this coast."<sup>7</sup> American observers relished lurid accounts as the Cashman family lived happily in the excited bustle of the town. It was not fear that caused them to move to the next opportunity; rather, it was the declining economic fortunes of the mines and thus of Pioche itself. Cashman left boardinghouse work and decided to join a group prospecting in the frozen north. She led a rescue expedition and earned the sobriquet "the Angel of Cassiar." Afterward, she opened a restaurant at Tucson in 1879 but left to join the rush to Tombstone where she partnered with other women to open two businesses. One reporter commented, "She is as adventurous in pushing forward to a new region as any nomadic miner," but in many ways, that was what she was.<sup>8</sup> She aggressively collected donations for the construction of Catholic hospitals, schools, and churches; but she was equally dismissive of women's Progressive reform groups as Protestant snobbery, "clubs for catty women and false standards of living."<sup>9</sup> She saw America through Irish Catholic eyes, stating that "all enjoy the liberty of pursuing the road of wealth and happiness according to the dictates of his own conscience" by flying the American flag on British holidays, collecting for the Land League, and calling her hotel "the American."<sup>10</sup> She cared for her sister's five orphaned children for three years and then, as Tombstone began to fade economically, placed them in Catholic institutions before continuing her wandering with the next mining rush, again defying social and occupational expectations.<sup>11</sup>

Cashman demonstrated the importance of her heritage through her unrelenting support of and loyalty to Catholicism, but this was just one of many ways of expressing her multifaceted Irishness. Ethnic identity could subtly or overtly influence people's lives and choices. It could affect where they lived, where they prayed, where they socialized, who they befriended,

the way they interacted with others, and the way people from other ethnic backgrounds—including Anglo-Americans—interacted with them, positively or negatively. Unsurprisingly, they, like the larger body of Irish-America of which they were part, were not a uniform mass; their Irishness reveals itself as measureless and heterogeneous, best understood on a sort of spectrum where the varied hues of green and orange of the Irish-born and their descendants in America show themselves to be as diverse as the lives they lived. Some of them fell away from their Irishness and wholly adopted an American identity, though the numbers who did this and the degree to which this was possible for migrants and their descendants will remain a source of fruitful historical discussion for some time.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever its rather fuzzy boundaries, there is no dispute that Irish Catholicism became the *de facto* identity of the group regardless of where on the spectrum of Irishness or religiosity individuals placed themselves, and both the Roman Catholic Church and the Nationalist label became central in forging the physical structures and imagery that bound Irish-American communities together. Irish Protestants, in contrast, mingled and merged seamlessly into the Anglo-American population, practically disappearing within a generation. Unlike Irish Catholics, there is no evidence that Irish Protestants suffered discrimination from Americans; nor is there evidence that they formed a separate culture or community. Irish Protestants used the term *Scotch Irish* or *Scots Irish* in mug-shot histories such as the *Progressive Men of Montana*, not as an effort to form their own identity but rather to distance themselves from the prejudice against Catholicism and the ways it was tied to popular perceptions and stereotypes of geographic Ireland, in particular the association with poverty. Thus, when individuals used the term *Scotch Irish*, they did so to vouch for the religious and class pedigree of their ancestors. Irish-born Catholics and their children—those who would form the identity known as Irish-American—remained a distinct group from white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and continued to visibly demonstrate their ethnicity even if Irish Catholics had ample opportunity to leave it all behind and fully “assimilate.”

Other subtle differences existed within this group, the most important of which is the class distinction between the lace-curtain/middle-class Irish and working-class Irish. There was also a depth of local association. On a broader scale, there was the Fardowner and Corkonian rivalry, which stretched back

to the United Irishmen rebellion and beyond.<sup>13</sup> More narrowly, allegiance to parish was intense and commonly appears in any description of an Irish person by themselves in their recollections or by others in obituaries or on headstones (see chapter 3, this volume). In mining, other divisions within the group were related to occupational skill levels corresponding to three primary types of Irish miner. The first was the skilled miner. Often, they entered the mines at a young age, grew up to be as skilled as their famed Cornish counterparts, and had similar pride in their occupational skill. The aristocrats of the mining occupation, they were found in significant numbers in Virginia City, Leadville, and Butte. They were generally lifelong miners and rarely left the occupation unless compelled by death or infirmity. The second type was the temporary miner, sometimes called the “ten-day miner.” They mined for a while but alternated between mining and other jobs, usually depending on economic circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Often, these were experienced miners, but they had no deep attachment to the occupation, viewing it as a job rather than a lifelong career. The third category was the placer miner. Unlike hard-rock miners, they rarely delved deep into the bowels of the earth and had limited mining skills. They were searching for the rich diggings and usually sold off their promising claims for someone else to work and began their hunt anew somewhere else. They panned for gold in the rivers and are remembered fondly in the popular imagination as the classic ‘49er Argonauts. The categories could be porous; some skilled miners became placer miners and some, such as Cashman, developed mining skills after a lifetime of prospecting. Some hard-rock miners joined the gold rushes and mingled briefly with these placer miners, but the surface deposits in the American West were rapidly combed in a few frantic years; as hydraulic mining became widespread and deeper mine shafts were needed to reach gold and silver deposits deeper underground, the demand for the skills of the hard-rock miners increased.<sup>15</sup> The prospect of longer-term employment made the decision to continue gambling on the next big strike less likely and attractive, although miners sometimes kept spare mining equipment in case of a particularly promising rush nearby.

As the diversity of ethnic attachments and occupational divisions suggests, there is no single story of Irish miners. A wide spectrum traversed the American West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to dig, haul, drill, and blast an income from the earth. They worked in every manner of

mining, as famed gold-rush prospectors, as hydraulic miners washing hills away, and as copper miners in the honeycombed depths under the city of Butte. A small few struck the mother lode and became immensely wealthy. Irish miners migrated not only from Ireland but often several times across the US. They traveled seeking jobs, comrades, and wives, remaining in one location from a few weeks to a few decades before moving on. Perhaps the most famous example of a *spailpín fáinach*, a wandering laborer, was Donegal-born Michael MacGowan. He tried his hand at copper and gold mining, wandering in both an occupational and a geographic sense, and recorded his movement across America and eventually back to Donegal in the memoir *Rotha mór an tSaoil* (The Great Wheel of Life).<sup>16</sup> The title tied the Irish proverb on the turning fortunes of life to his mobility.

The late 1840s witnessed two formative periods in Irish and American migration history: the Great Famine and the Gold Rush. Omitting either of these watersheds would leave a huge gap in the story of the Irish, the Irish in America, and the development of the American West. This book closely examines the emerging mining industry and shows micro-frontiers of opportunity opening, evolving, and—sometimes as quickly—closing. These frontiers formed parts of a system whereby Irish miners and laborers traveled looking for jobs, establishing communities, often raising families, and sometimes finding a manner of stability in the most uncertain industry in the nineteenth century. The mid-nineteenth century marked the advent of large-scale industrial mining, while the arrival of mechanization and strip mining in the late nineteenth century was akin to a long twilight for the skilled miner.

By the early twentieth century, mechanized mining was a very different occupation from its antecedent. Large-scale mining swept aside smaller, less profitable mines—at first locally, then nationally. This final act in the present story marks the waning point of Irish influence in the mining towns. Irish-American mining communities faded as the company-worker relationship that sustained them broke down and was replaced by corporations whose loyalty lay solely with their shareholders rather than the owner's ethnic group. This move, in turn, encouraged a largely Irish-American trade union leadership to build a more inclusive tent and move away from the skill- and ethnic-based distinctions that had often fractured and weakened earlier mining unions.

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Upward mobility from blue-collar mining to white-collar labor was most often a multi-generational journey for the Irish. Whereas statistics in literacy or fluency in English or Irish remain difficult to establish, every Irish migrant would have encountered the English language by the time they arrived on America's shores. Most Irish were fluent or bilingual, and this gave them significant advantages in labor relations.<sup>17</sup> Later, as opportunity declined, their children's rigorous, largely Irish-Catholic education represented the flip side of the same coin of American mobility.

The most significant decline in opportunity was represented by the concurrent creation of a professional managerial and engineer class, which, in turn, solidified the stratification of employment in the mining industry, closing possible avenues of career and class advancement for miners once dependent on circumstances as tentative as ethnic favoritism by mine owners (see chapters 5 and 6, this volume). Earlier mining histories lumped miners of all skill levels into one occupational category or suggested skill distinctions based entirely on ethnic identity, muting their heterogeneity.<sup>18</sup> The Irish as a group show how mistaken this historical approach is, since although many were placer miners and "ten-day" miners, there were also many skilled miners. A reason for this error has been the ease with which historians classed the Cornish as the premier miners in the US. Historians have tended to ignore their privilege (i.e., preferential promotion of more acceptable Anglo-Protestants by mine management and discrimination against other ethnic groups) and confuse their long-standing mining heritage with the fallacy that the Cornish were the only skilled miners. They interpret long-held historical prejudices as historical realities instead of contextualizing each place with its unique amalgamation of people. For example, a wheelbarrow was often referred to as an Irish buggy by miners, as an insult to the Irish and to associate them with the less skillful "mucker" position in the mines. Conversely, narrow tunnels were nicknamed "'Cousin Jacks,' because only Cornishmen were supposed to be able to work in them."<sup>19</sup> As the American miner who wrote those details noted, however, his Irish comrades did work there "and they taught me how to do it too."<sup>20</sup>

The diversity of the Irish mining experience coupled with their enduring adherence to their religious and cultural identity meant that those historians who had previously lumped them together did so without an adequate understanding of the paths the Irish trod on their way to the American West.

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A mining history that avoids this trap is David M. Emmons's monograph on the Butte Irish wherein he details the unique position of Irish miners in a single American mining town. However, treating Butte as a node rather than the sole focus illuminates the twisted paths of fortune trod by the migrant community, even in towns near that green beating heart of Montana, such as Marysville.<sup>21</sup>

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner defined the early historiography of the American West by postulating that the frontier experience reinvented the immigrant as American; thus, in this framework, the Irish are mashed into the broader body of white immigrants and effectively erased from the history of the American West.<sup>22</sup> This muting of ethnic distinctions was integral to the early mythology of the American West, with linear or overly reified narratives including cowboys versus Indians and the progress of civilization through Manifest Destiny, acting as a veneer to justify the territorial expansion west and simultaneously portraying its population as exclusively American—by definition, white and Protestant. This Turnerian school has been thoroughly eclipsed by New Western history, an approach that made important strides in correcting the historiographical lens. This effort focused on the underwritten history of the exploited, beginning with American Indians and later expanded to include women, Latinos, and Asians. Yet this approach has sometimes failed to explore the very real fissures and fusions between and within cultural groups and subsumed the Irish under the broad terms Anglo, British, or white.

The ways the Irish saw their experiences in the American West were different from the way others viewed them and were informed by their own history. Exemplifying the distinctive Irish perspective were Fr. Eugene O'Connell and Michael MacGowan. For example, O'Connell served the California missions in the 1850s, where he blamed the decline in the Indian population on relentless exploitation at the hands of "rapacious agents." He wrote mournfully, "What a people that race of the 'red man' might have become . . . he has no country anymore," and in a resigned Christian hope of a hereafter he added, "'tis well he will have a grave and a Father beyond it."<sup>23</sup> Decades later, in the far-off state of Montana, MacGowan was working in a silver mine at Granite Mountain when he noticed the strong tensions between Indians and encroaching Americans. He contextualized the origins of the conflict as a result of the actions of a "greedy white man . . . with friends at court or a planter without conscience."<sup>24</sup> The use of the word *plandóir* (planter) rather

than *ionnaitheoir* (settler) deliberately linked the plantations in Ireland with the contemporary struggles of the Indians in the West. In the next few lines he reinforces this parallel:

The Indians that were left here and there were in a bad way and we had a great deal of pity for them—the same thing had happened to ourselves home in Ireland. We knew their plight well. We understood their attachment to the land of their ancestors and their desire to cultivate it as well as their wish to keep their own customs and habits without interference from the white man. We were interfering with them I suppose, as well as everybody else but at least some of us sensed that if they were wild itself, it was not without cause.<sup>25</sup>

MacGowan simultaneously paralleled the Irish history of dispossession with the experiences of Indians and distinguished the Irish from “the white people” (*ón mhuintir bhána*), a cultural and ideological divorce from the racial ideas of whiteness. He further admitted their partial culpability, tempering it with a resigned sympathetic note contextualizing the Indians’ present difficulty as imposed privation and their hostility as justified.<sup>26</sup> He was not looking at the situation as the average Anglo-American would, with the Indians as irredeemable savages or a ground-up by-product within the wheels of progress.

The Irish brought their unique worldview with them on their long journey through the territorial and industrial expansion of the US. The chapters in this book trace the veins of these communities that spread across the region, revealing how the people organized their lives, their relationships, and their ties beyond the places they lived. The transnational, sometimes multi-generational migrants traveled from Ireland, often through Britain, to the eastern United States and then to the American West. Direct lines of migration perpetuated by social networks, for example, from the Beara Peninsula to Butte, played an important role in the emergence of tight-knit neighborhoods such as Corktown in Butte. Britain is also an oft-ignored and important part of the staggered and indirect migration story of Irish miners to the US. They often traveled through British ports, frequently spending time working in mines in Scotland, England, and Wales to earn money for the onward journey.

Irish migration was a web stretching across the world and was not limited to a single town or city. With notable exceptions such as David Thomas Brundage’s *The Making of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver’s Organized*

*Workers, 1878–1905* and Gunther Peck’s *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930*, the limited city or town or state view has been the standard. Even across the broad historiography of the American West, a cursory search for the term *Irish* in the indices of the hundreds of history books on the American West or the dozens of books in the subcategory of mining leaves the distinct impression that the Irish melted into the background of American history rapidly and effortlessly.<sup>27</sup> One edited collection opens with the clarion call “European immigrants are the forgotten people of the West,” and certainly the complexities and diversity of the European immigrant population of the West have yet to be fully recovered from the mythologizing period that forged the first histories of these places.<sup>28</sup> The research in the following pages arose out of these explorations and, in turn, reveals in a direct way that the Irish cannot be divorced from any part of the American West. Correspondingly, mining cannot be extracted from the history of these places—its presence lingers on through the imprint of a thousand abandoned mine shafts and ghost towns on the landscape to the story of the communities now living in these regions.

The reasons the influence and breadth of the Irish were forgotten in historiography varied based on the period and the field of study. The subcategory of mining preoccupied itself with the technological and operational aspects of the industry. For example, explorations of the subtleties of ethnic identity usually extend only so far as to mention Cornish miners, largely because of their notoriety as the premier skilled hard-rock miners in the nineteenth century and the famed mining traditions of Cornwall. Greater focus on the mixed composition of the workforce and a wider awareness of the diversity of mining experience distracted from the economic narrative, one that seemed to operate on the premise that the quantity of material mined, rather than the workers who mined it, defined the story of the extractive industry. This led to an overemphasis on technological changes that sidelined the transformations in the mining workforce, the most important of which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century when eastern and southern European peoples overtook British, Irish, Chinese, and German residents as the largest immigrant groups—a change that further subsumed the Irish into the Anglo or British category for the sake of a simpler historical narrative.

Yet a simple narrative does not easily accommodate cultural distinctions or the story of Irish miners in the American West, either in the first part detailing

the often thin occupational line between miner and mucker or laborer or, later, in telling the story of how the Irish interacted and worked with other ethnic groups, in particular the complicated relationships between them and the Chinese, Finns, Italians, and others.<sup>29</sup> These distinctions are prerequisites for any attempt to understand the development of trade unionism in the American West. Like others, miners' day-to-day lives were determined more by their social circles and their interactions with others than by the technology of their occupation, and it is impossible to understand why some would be in favor of trade unionism or opposed to workers' organization without the context of personal identity and experiences of circumstance. Stability, better wages, and safety were defining motivators, broadly encapsulated as opportunity; but in many cases this was a secondary consideration compared to the close bonds of family, friends, and faith that tied them to each other and gave their lives meaning.

Industrial history requires a more inclusive approach and nuanced framework that builds on the work of the New Western school in which we can understand the unique place of the Irish in the American West. Cultural allegiances, seen most obviously through Irish immigrants' continued allegiance to Catholicism and the persistence of ethnic divisions, contradict the very core of the frontier hypothesis—the reinvention of immigrants as Americans. The Irish fashioned their communities into ones that fostered their Irishness even in remote mining towns, often by choosing Irish wives, Irish friends, and Irish associations. The temporary nature of mining and the corresponding shifting ground of opportunity for employment and steady wages regularly meant that these community bonds had to be forged and re-forged many times over the course of multiple migrations.

Their persistence in reestablishing an organized Irish presence is remarkable. Emmons notes the dozens of mining towns in the American West that are included in newspaper subscription lists as having collected funds to support Irish nationalist causes.<sup>30</sup> Some are explored in the following chapters, while others have yet to have their full histories written; still others have left so meager a historical record that an odd reference in some surviving newspaper remains the only trace of what was a thriving Irish congregation. The diversity of experiences helps us see similarities in the struggle for identity and place, the dynamic relationships with allies, and the reasons the Irish faced the adversaries they did.

Despite repeated dislocation, community anchored many to their sense of self and society and played a vital role in miners' lives. The men and their income provided the foundation for what emerged, but the structure was built by women, priests, nuns, and children without whom Irish communities were evanescent. Although hundreds of smaller outposts in the form of mining camps and prospectors dotted the landscape, most mining during this period was an urban occupation because the workforces required to work the larger, deeper mines necessarily gave rise to sizable towns. The population density proved alluring to Irishmen, who disliked the isolation of American agriculture and remembered the fresh trauma of the Great Famine, *an Gorta Mór*. The examples of Virginia City and Butte (chapters 3 and 6, this volume) suggest that Irish women shared the same preference for urban frontiers rather than rural ones. If women appear as secondary actors in portraying the life of these mining towns and communities, it is not intentional but instead represents the scarcity of firsthand accounts from the figures coupled with the occupational dominance of males in mining. The limited surviving miners' letters, fraternal records, and company records are almost silent when it comes to the role of women in nineteenth-century mining towns. Parish records such as the internment book of Smartsville, the patient logbook of Virginia City, and census records (chapters 2 and 3, this volume) reveal some aspects of their lives but represent the barest of starts in an effort to comprehensively detail women's and families' roles in ethnic communities throughout this mining diaspora.

This project began with the discovery of a series of Irish emigrant letters in an early version of the Irish Emigration Database, which I found on a research visit to the Irish Migration Centre in Omagh. Further research led me to Professor Kerby Miller who generously granted me access to his vast collection, which included many letters that contribute greatly to our understanding of the life of Irish migrants in the American West. In the context of the period, the surviving letters are a fragment of what was once a global communication network. They offer a fascinating window into the thoughts and feelings of the Irish scattered across the world and the types of information they thought it was important to share.<sup>31</sup> Newspapers provided another major source of information, and both tools relied on migrants' ability to write and read or at least to know someone who did. As literacy increased, so too did the migrants' reliance on them for information; the letters often





**Figure 0.1.** The arrival of an emigrant letter was an exciting occasion for family and friends in Ireland. The letter was a source of consolation, advice, and warning often treasured by relatives. In the painting a young girl reads a letter from America aloud to her family. James Brenan, *News from America* (1875). Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland.

asked relatives in Ireland to send them newspapers so they could read the local and national news. This shrinkage of the world through regular news correspondence and faster communication also encouraged the formation of Irish societies and fraternities dedicated to causes dear to the migrants' hearts, such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, whose limited surviving records are utilized in chapters 3 and 6.

A consistent theme across this broad chronological and geographical span is the importance of ethnic organizations and forms of protest in the struggle for a fair living. The Irish in these mining towns had the same exceptional

organizational and political savvy that made them so powerful in the major cities of New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. Sometimes these organizations were either ethnically or religiously exclusive, but a draft note from Marysville, California, reveals that there were some efforts to reach out to the wider community and explains the causes of hostility, if it existed. The note sought the organization of all Irishmen of Marysville, regardless of religious denomination, into an association for the promotion of Irish causes, and in this case ethnic and national identity trumped religious loyalty. The note also contained a warning against “wolves in sheeps [*sic*] clothing”; the writers of this document had experience dealing with agitators, spies, and agent provocateurs.<sup>32</sup> A further consistent theme reinforcing Irish suspicions was the predatory behavior of vigilantes and businesses. The most personal spaces were vulnerable by definition and became targets for infiltrators. The widespread evidence from Pinkerton and Thiel detective reports provides proof that such fears were fully justified. These sources also provide a wealth of intimate information about miners, albeit filtered through prejudiced eyes and ears. The detectives frequently report dialogue overheard between workers and hint at how the Irish perceived their fellow workers, themselves, and their position in society. When used carefully, they offer a remarkable view into life and labor for these groups during this period.

Pre-migration experiences also form a crucial part of these people’s story. The Irish brought with them an intimate familiarity with opposition to powerful systems of authority through various means, political and otherwise, drawing on strong traditions of agrarian agitation—a set of grievances established by the trauma of recent Irish history and reinforced by their own emigration. They recognized themselves as a single drop in the vast swell of economic emigrants, who were also making sense of their own dislocation and identity. In the US they became foremost agitators for workers’ rights and consistently resisted company control of miners’ pay, communities, and lives. When mine companies targeted the Irish or unions (the terms were often interchangeable), agitation increased as a response to their actions.

Evidence of anti-Catholicism directed at Irish-run Catholic institutions and fraternities is presented in chapter 3, while local anti-Irish discrimination, most conspicuous in chapters 4 and 5, represented a coordinated mobilization of business and government forces against an ethnic group. Mine companies intentionally engaged in exploitative practices and encouraged ethnic



friction and violence to strengthen their position and dominate communities, both politically and socially. Management's short-term goals were only partially focused on lowering wages and maximizing profits; as newly discovered documents reveal, their worldview focused on consolidating power, the mechanisms of which were infused with specific ethnic prejudices. In other words, company documents reveal how these officials perceived the Irish and prove that many labor disputes were based on bigotry rather than any natural friction between workers and owners.

The importance of ethnic identity and the uniqueness of Irish miners in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America is a constant refrain in the primary sources of the period. Their lives expose a distinctive web, with hubs concentrated in mining towns and reaching across America and world-wide back to Ireland. The history of Irish involvement in the US mining industry details a relentless effort to earn a fair income and form a community despite repeated setbacks, often created by Anglo-Americans in positions of power in mine companies. Management stoked up and armed nativist groups in an attempt to divide towns and pit communities against one another.<sup>33</sup> The following chapters set out to explore the degree to which Irish-American experiences differed from those of other ethnic groups and demonstrate how Irish-Americans interacted with those groups within the backdrop of each location. Comparisons between these local case studies highlight the complexity of the story of Irish miners in the American West and the unique space they carved for themselves in many varying contexts. Irish men, women, and children shared broad interactions with other peoples, including Asian immigrants, European immigrants, Indians, and native-born Americans. The rich tapestry of cultural experiences expressed in these Irish identities formed the backdrop for these complex encounters as the Irish sought to survive and thrive in the spaces they built for themselves in mining areas.

To be an Irish miner in the American West was to be both uprooted and transplanted many times and a wandering laborer whose home and community would always be transient—ephemeral in a way. And yet the time and effort spent building and rebuilding those homes and communities again and again was not futile—it sustained them, most obviously in their identity, while also strengthening them. The links forged demanded respect from others, and this local power was linked to other Irish networks as far distant

as the mythologized homeland, inviting them to follow and deepen the legacy. This is hinted at on the scattered headstones describing the parish of origin, in the Irish counties listed in hospital books next to Irish patients, in the malevolent letters written among American mine managers about their Irish workers, and on statues of St. Patrick in the many Catholic churches scattered throughout those vast expanses. Being Irish could ensure that one would find employment in Butte but not 60 miles away in Marysville. It could offer companionship within unions or fraternities but court hatred from vigilantes and masons. It created a sense of community but placed the Irish and their communities beyond the American pale.<sup>34</sup> Inevitably, a degree of accommodation and an element of friction were the consequences. The trails and trials of the Irish in the mining frontiers of the American West illuminate some forgotten historical stories and place them as an important piece of the wider puzzle: that of the Irish diaspora.