# *The Irish in the Caribbean*[1]

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**Abstract:** *This paper is a historical account of the Irish immigration and colonization in the 1600s. It also analyses how the Irish turned from white slaves into an Irish entrepreneurial class in the 18th century.*

Although legend has it that Christopher Columbus stopped in Galway on a journey to the North Atlantic ca. 1490, there is no evidence that any Irishmen accompanied him on his four journeys to the Caribbean between 1492 and 1504. However, 500 years later, traces of subsequent Irish trade, piracy, and immigration (both voluntary and involuntary) permeate the region. How did this Irish presence come about? For example, the island of Montserrat in the Leeward Islands of the eastern Caribbean was covered by rain forests providing shelter and sustenance to the Arawak Indians when Columbus arrived there in 1493, though they were gradually decimated by disease and slavery. In 1632, British and Irish colonists began to arrive from the neighboring island of St. Kitts, probably accompanied by a few African slaves. Today, the population is more than 90% black, with its parent stock mainly of West African origin but, when asked about his nationality, a Montserratian is likely to say, "Mon, I'm Irish!" The spirit of the early Irish settlers pervades all aspects of island life, and it is known as the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean. Many of the place names are Irish, as are some 30% of the surnames of the black residents, e.g., Sweeney, Riley, O'Brien and Kelly. (Fallon 1993, 18) The traditional musical instruments on the island are the fife and drum; one of the folk dances, called "heel and toe," bears a strong similarity to the jig; the national dish, "Goatwater," may derive from the Irish stew; and island residents celebrate St. Patrick's Day with exuberance.(Fallon 1991, 13)

During the 1600s Irish Catholics began appearing in every mainland American colony, particularly Virginia and Maryland. Names such as "New Ireland" and "New Munster" designated tracts of land set aside for Irish settlers and their servants. However, the most visible settlement of Irish Catholics in the 17th century was in the West Indies, largely because Irish-born governors of the Caribbean islands encouraged their fellow countrymen to emigrate, and because the predominant southern Irish trade routes brought Catholics to colonies dominated by plantation agriculture. (Miller 139, 144) The British and Irish settled on St. Kitts in 1623, Barbados in 1627, Nevis in 1628, Antigua and Montserrat in 1632. The most important of these settlements was Barbados (Collier

212) and by 1666 the white population of the island was about 1/5 Irish. On Montserrat the ratio was reversed and there were six Irish to every English colonist (Pulsipher 42) By 1678, the Irish comprised about 1/3 of the free inhabitants of the Leeward Islands (Miller 139).

Regarding settlement in the western Caribbean, in 1629 Charles I of England claimed the Bahamas, deeding them, along with Carolina, to Sir Robert Heath, who never established his intended colony. The first permanent colony in the Bahamas was established on the island of Eleuthera in 1648, when religious and political strife between Anglican Royalists and Puritan Republicans was tearing apart the English colonies. In 1647 William Sayle, a Puritan who had served two terms as governor of Bermuda, sought funds in London to establish another colony, to be located on "Eleutheria and the Bahama Islands," with "Eleutheria" from the Greek "eleuthros" ("freedom"). Sayle specified freedom in his colony to mean that there would be republicanism, a single legislature and religious toleration, but not the abolition of rights of property or privilege (Bregenzer 21).

An investment of £1000 made one an "Eleutherian Adventurer." Few of these adventurers actually emigrated to the Bahamas. They were shareholders in a commercial venture and probably never recouped their investment. Sayle's scheme raised enough money to finance the voyage of 70 colonists, mostly from Bermuda. Among the settlers were Currys and possibly Kellys with Irish origins, and their descendants continue to live in Eleuthera and the Abaco island group. (Riley 1983) According to Lefroy's *Memorials of Bermuda, 1515-1685,* the ship's captain, named Butler (also of Irish stock?), created dissent within the group:

> He could not endure any ordinances or worship, etc., and when they arrived at one of the Eleutherian Islands (possibly Spanish Wells), and were intended there to settle, he made such a faction as enforced... Sayle to remove to another island (Eleuthera itself), and being near the harbour the ship struck and was cast away.[2]

One life and all the provisions were lost. The survivors took refuge in a cave, still called "Preacher's Cave," on the north side of the island, where early 17th-century artifacts have recently been discovered. Sayle took the remaining ship and eight men to Virginia to seek aid, where the Church provided them with a ship full of supplies to take back to Eleuthera. In April 1650 more supplies were received from two Puritan churches in Boston. The Bostonians stayed a month on the island when they delivered the supplies, becoming the first tourists to the island. Sayle and company treated them well, repaying the relief expedition with ten tons of Braziletto dyewood for the return voyage. This was to be sold to pay the costs of the expedition and any remaining funds were to be donated to the new college in Boston (Harvard). Remaining funds amounted to £124, the third largest sum donated at that point to Harvard, and were spent on a new building. (Bregenzer. 22; "A Tale of Two Cities" 41)

## Immigration and Colonization

At first most of the British and Irish immigrants to the West Indies came over voluntarily, drawn by the hope of acquiring their own land. However, from the early 1600s, the English and Irish Protestant leaders viewed the colonies as suitable dumping grounds for rebellious "papists." (Miller 143) During the 1640s and 1650s, many were kidnapped, particularly those living near the coast, and "Barbadosed" took on the same meaning that "Shanghaied" has today. One estimate states that 6400 white slaves were rounded up in Ireland and Scotland during a four-year period and sent to the West Indies (Arciniegas 1993). After 1650, with the end of the British Civil War, thousands of Irish and Scottish captives from Cromwell's expeditions to those countries were forcibly brought to Virginia and the West Indies as slaves or indentured servants (Rogozinski 1992, 71, 85; Miller 143-44). After 1654 British attention turned westwards to the Greater Antilles as part of Cromwell's "Western Design" to capture the entire Caribbean, including Hispaniola and Cuba, from Spain. However, the conquest of Jamaica in 1655 was the only part of the plan to be realized. Under Cromwell, and then under Charles II after 1660, the colonization of Jamaica by British and Irish immigrants became a major priority for Great Britain.

In the early days, working conditions were brutal, and some owners cruelly punished shirkers. Religious differences between Irish Catholic servants and Anglican masters increased the abuse. An account of Barbados from 1667 described the Irish indentured servants there as "poor men, that are just permitted to live,... derided by the Negroes, and branded with the Epithite of white slaves." During their terms of service they worked "in the parching sun without shirt, shoe or stocking" "domineered over and used like dogs," as the governor of Barbados admitted in 1695, and when they were freed they generally fell into a hand-to-mouth existence which consigned them to the very bottom of West Indian society (Miller 144-45).

After 1660, fewer indentured servants came to Barbados or the Leewards, although some continued to go to Jamaica throughout the 18th century. Indentured labor was unable to sustain a pattern of colonial life, and transported convict laborers were also found to be unsatisfactory. Most English and Irish settlers eventually found life in the mainland American colonies to be preferable. In the second half of the 17th century, the West Indies became increasingly devoted to sugar-cane cultivation and, on most islands, African slaves did most of the hard field work, forming the majority of the population. In fact, during this period more than half the slaves transported from Africa went to the Caribbean. Based on their experiences, many native Irish associated emigration to the New World swith banishment and slavery. Writing in 1660, the agent Robert Southwell lamented his inability to entice Catholic servants from Munster to South Carolina: "I could not obteyne any for the thing at present seems new & forraigne to them, &... they have been so terrified with the ill practice of them to the Carib Ileands, where they were sould as slaves, that as yet they will hardly give credence to any other usage..." (Miller 44).

Alarmed by this trend, after 1670 both mainland and island governments enacted legislation to encourage white immigration. They required planters to bring in indentured servants and sometimes subsidized their cost. Most also passed laws requiring better treatment of white servants. Masters had to give servants a minimum amount of food and clothing, and they needed a magistrate's permission to flog them (Rogozinksi 71). However, discontented servants regularly burned cane fields on Barbados and planned an armed uprising in 1649. In 1666 the Irish servants and freemen on St. Kitts celebrated the declaration of war between England and France by rising up against the English planters and aiding the French in taking control of the island, evicting 800 English planters (Rolston, *ibid*.). The following year the Irish on Montserrat also helped the French take the island from the English. In 1689, when word reached the Caribbean of William of Orange's accession to the throne, the Irish against revolted on St. Kitts and plundered English estates in support of King James (Rogozinski 71). At the same time Antigua and Montserrat were on the verge of mutiny. The Barbados Irishman who received twelve lashes for swearing at dinner that "if there was so much English Blood in the tray as there was Meat, he would eat it," expressed a tribal hatred born during the Elizabethan and Cromwellian conquests, which he may have regarded as responsible for his present "exile." (Miller 147).

As in later Irish immigration to America, there was often a gender imbalance among the Irish emigrants. According to one ship's captain writing in 1636 "lustye and strong boddied" women were "reddear... than men" to leave Munster for the Caribbean. (Dunn 57; Miller, 140) Later on, the heavily male character of the cargoes of Irish led to consternation among the government leaders, who sought to stabilize Barbadian and Leeward Island society by creating a balance between the sexes. In September 1655, Henry Cromwell wrote to Secretary of State John Thurlow:

> Concerning the younge women, although we must use force in taking them up, yet it beinge so much for their own goode, and likely to be of soe great advantage to the publique, it is not the least doubted, that you may have such number of them as you shall thinke fitt to make use uppon this account (*apud* Burg 80).

Soon realizing that the colonization plan would need to include more Irish males as well, the young Cromwell recommended sending some 1,500 to 2,000 boys of 12 to 14 years. The Council of State duly voted to ship 1,000 girls and the like number of boys under the age of 14 to the West Indies. However, after further efforts to implement the scheme, it was eventually dropped in favor of sending more adult males. Following the suppression of the Irish insurrection of 1656, the volume of immigrants to the West Indies became so great that the government was forced to contract for their shipment. These generally numbered between 100 and 400 Irish, with the largest shipment from Ireland during these years being 1,200 males. (Burg, 81) The majority of Irish emigrants remained single men: in 1678, for example, only 1/4 of the adult Irish in the Leeward Islands were women (Miller 140).

During the late 17th century, there were numerous reasons for Irish emigration. In the early 1670s, for instance, poor harvests and livestock disease were so widespread in Munster that, according to the Quaker missionary William Edmundson, "several Families that had lived plentifully,... their Corn being spent and Cattle dead,... shipped themselves for Servants to the West Indies, to get food... (*apud* Miller 141) Following Cromwell's land confiscations, some of the defeated Catholic gentry left for the New World, e.g., the O'More chieftain left Queen's County for South Carolina in the late 1600s, where his son and grandson, Anglicized in name and religion, became colonial governors. The largest migration of this kind were the younger sons of the Galway "tribes" – Old English gentry and merchant families such as the Blakes, Darcys and Kirwans – who established sugar plantations and counting houses in Barbados, Montserrat and other Caribbean islands, hoping to recoup their family fortunes.

Of course, many of the Irish immigrants to the West Indies were successful, especially if they arrived as freemen with capital, skills and education. In 1673 the Montserrat plantation owner Henry Blake wrote to his "loveing Brother" in Galway that he enjoyed "a good plentifull liveing," though he returned to Ireland once he made his fortune.(Dunn 130) Other affluent Irishmen in the West Indies used their financial surplus to build Catholic churches, repay family debts and help the poor at home (Miller145). Considering their initial poverty even former servants could do quite well. For example, by the late 17th century some 10 percent of Jamaica's landowners were of Irish extraction and several, such as Teague Mackmarroe, who owned eight slaves, attained the rank of "middling planter." (loc. cit.).

Recent excavations of one of the Irish-owned plantations in Montserrat have revealed much about the physical and social aspects of the colonization process. Galways plantation was established in the 1660s by David Galway, an Irishman with strong English rather than Irish sympathies. A major in the island militia, by the late 1670s he was serving on the Montserrat Council, an appointed position usually given only to prominent landowners.

David Galway's plantation lay on the SW slopes of the Soufriere Hills and consisted of some 1300 acres, stretching from the sea to the top of the mountains between Germans Ghaut and the White River. The majority of the 311 Irish who lived in 59 households on or near Galway's land in 1673 settled on the barren, windswept slopes to the south of the sugar works on small plots where they kept goats, sheep and pigs, and probably provided seasonal labor to the plantation. The 1673 map shows that the sugarcane fields were in wetter zones high above the sugar-processing facilities. According to the 1677 census, population density was quite high throughout the SW part of the island: more than 40 percent of the total island population lived there. Most were white and nearly all were Irish, and they lived on less than 10% of the total island territory – poor, dry land at that. In 1669 David Galway was placed in charge of enforcing the island laws in this SW district, laws focussing primarily on control of the Irish underclass (Pulsipher 142-43).

Apparently, the spatial organization of sugar production on Galways Mountain remained well into the 18th century, but between the 1670s and the 1720s the plantation declined as an economic enterprise. Probably the dry stony lower slopes proved difficult for human habitation. According to a 1729 census, by then the Galway family had no white servants and just 62 slaves. After 1730 new owners relocated and modernized the plantation, building an elegant Georgian great house, new sugar works, and a warehouse 1100 feet above the sea, with an extensive water management system and a slave village just below and in view of the new installation. This upgrading of facilities reflects the enormous success of sugar in the European markets, with many investors coming out to cash in on the sugar boom. Old families such as the Galways began to divest themselves of marginal, unproductive holdings, and the new owners optimistically invested in more salubrious locations and modern technologies. They also spent considerable money on aesthetic improvements as well as rational water management (Pulsipher 143).

By the mid-18th century, the descendants of the earlier Irish immigrants to Montserrat were generally in the position of being slave owners, rather than slaves or indentured servants. Thus, St. Patrick's Day may be celebrated by the present Afro-Irish inhabitants today partly as a commemoration of the March 1768 slave rebellion, held on that day because the black slaves knew the white plantation owners would be celebrating. When the word leaked out, the uprising was aborted and several slaves were hanged. Other rebellions resulted in a restriction of religious, civil and political rights on the island until 1798. In 1802, with the emancipation of slaves, civil rights were restored, though the Catholic religion was still banned. Priests said Mass in secret, some being smuggled from nearby St. Kitts (60 miles away) disguised as sugar cane workers. In 1826, the British-controlled Assembly finally granted a Roman Catholic clergyman £100 to "furnish a convenient place of worship for his flock."(Fallon 1993).

## Trade and Piracy

"As early as the 1620s ships were sailing from southern Irish ports such as Cork and Kinsale, laden with provisions, textiles and Irish servants to exchange for West Indian sugar and Chesapeake tobacco." (Miller 139). Irish trade in the Caribbean was encouraged by the land confiscations of Irish Catholics during the 17th and 18th centuries. During this period, many families, denied landownership and professional careers, invested in commerce and engaged in trade with the Continent, the North American colonies and the West Indies (Miller 23). However, some of the Irish undoubtedly found piracy to be even more profitable than legitimate trade.

In the Bahamas, the arid climate and thin soil did not favor agriculture. Only a few settlers had remained on Eleuthera, eking out a miserable existence by looting (and perhaps causing) occasional shipwrecks. As Bermuda continued to grow, other expeditions ventured into the Bahamas. In 1666, one of these groups settled on New Providence Island, some 50 miles from Eleuthera. Within five years this island had

surpassed the earlier colony in population and its main settlement (Nassau) became recognized as the capital. The first census, conducted in 1671, reveals that New Providence had 913 residents (257 free males, 243 free females and 413 slaves in 127 households) while Eleuthera had only 184 residents (77 free males, 77 free females and 30 slaves) (Bregenzer 22). Since the Bahamas are strategically placed next to both the Windward Passage and the Florida Strait leading to the Gulf of Mexico, New Providence soon became the major base of operations for British and Irish pirates. The other 17th-century centers were Providence Island, off the coast of Nicaragua, which was a pirate stronghold until captured by the Spanish in 1641; the French-held island of Tortuga (Tortue) off Hispaniola; and the township of Port Royal in Jamaica, which long held the reputation of being "the wickedest town in the world." (Collier et al. 215-16). The latter was the base of the notorious Welsh-born pirate Henry Morgan (ca. 1635-88), originally an indentured servant in Barbados, who repeatedly raided Spanish settlements around the Caribbean before settling down to win respectability, a knighthood and the lieutenant-governorship of Jamaica (loc. cit.).

Particularly after the outbreak of war with France in 1689 and the destruction of Port Royal in an earthquake in 1692, British and Irish pirates based on Tortuga and Jamaica began to relocate to the Bahamas. The inhabitants welcomed the buccaneers' trade and several of the proprietary governors of Carolina, who had been granted the Bahamas by Charles II, openly helped them, selling them commissions as privateers with the right to attack enemy ships. Their numbers swelled after 1713, when they were joined by thousands of former privateers of varying national origins who had lost their livelihood with the Treaty of Utrecht, ending the War of the Spanish Succession, including the infamous Blackbeard (born Edward Teach or Drummond, probably in Bristol). As pirates they began to prey on merchant ships, including those flying the English flag. These easy pickings began to end in 1718, with the appointment of CaptainWoodes Rogers, himself a former privateer from western England, as the first royal governor of the Bahamas.

One of the most notorious Irish-born pirates of this period was actually a woman. Anne Bonney, who flourished ca. 1718-20, was the illegitimate daughter of a prosperous lawyer from Cork who took her and her mother to Carolina to avoid his wife's wrath and the town's disapproval. Her mother died soon after their arrival and Anne grew up independent and impetuous. After being thrown out of her home, she married a penniless seaman, James Bonney, and they moved to New Providence Island, hoping to make a fortune from trading with the local pirates and privateers. She had a child, whose history is unknown, and became the mistress of one of the most famous pirates operating off the American coast and in the West Indies, Capt. Rackham, known as "Calico Jack." She joined him in stealing a sloop from Providence Island and was his partner during raids on the Spanish off Cuba and Hispaniola. On board one of the ships they captured was Mary Read, another woman pirate, who allegedly became Anne's lover. In October 1720 their sloop was attacked off Jamaica by a government ship, Anne and Mary being

the last of the defenders to remain fighting on deck. At Anne's trial in Jamaica, her distinguished family and a false plea of pregnancy saved her from the death penalty and Mary, condemned to death, was also reprieved, though she later died in prison. Rackham and the rest of the crew were hanged, and the remainder of Anne's life is obscure (Uglow 69).

## The Caribbean Irish in the Eighteenth Century and Beyond

The growth of a slave-based economy steadily diminished economic opportunities for freed servants in the West Indies: thus, during the 1700s most Irish Catholic emigrants journeyed to the mainland colonies. In addition to Catholics, after 1715 increasingly large number of Protestants, particularly from the north (the so-called "Scotch-Irish"), began emigrating to America.[3] Dissenters, particularly Ulster Presbyterians, were the most prevalent, but they also included Methodists and Irish Quakers. Of the latter, some 3,000 Irish Friends settled in North America, from the middle colonies to the West Indies, between 1682 and 1776. These were primarily of English origin – farmers, merchants, artisans and discharged soldiers who settled in Ireland or converted to Quakerism after the Cromwellian conquest. (Miller 151) Like the 17th-century emigrants, indentured servants arriving with skills or who managed to be indentured to artisans and builders proved to be the most successful. For example, in 1764 John Hennessy, aged 19, landed in Charleston, South Carolina, and was indentured to a carter for four years. In time he acquired his own horses and wagons, and by 1778 his property amounted to £460, including a brick house, furniture, a gold watch, and twelve silver spoons (Miller 146). The American Revolution interrupted the flow of Irish immigrants to the New World, but after peace was declared in 1783 the rate once again picked up. By curtailing the British mercantile system the Revolution had sharply disrupted the old channels of Irish-American trade. Although Munster and Leinster continued to supply provisions for the West Indies, that destination had ceased to attract prospective emigrants. Furthermore, the traffic in Irish servants also declined since British captains could no longer count on American courts to enforce contracts of indenture (Miller 169).

We also see the development of an Irish entrepreneurial class with ties to the Americas during this period, among them the Belfast merchants Waddell Cunningham and Thomas Greg, whose firm Greg, Cunningham & Co. had been reckoned one of the largest shipowners in New York by the 1760s. Among others who were successful in the Americas before returning to Belfast were Valentine Jones in Barbados and Hugh Montgomery in Virginia (Crawford 64-65). By this point Belfast merchants were heavily involved in both the linen and cotton industries. In fact, Belfast became the center of the Irish linen industry largely as a result of the American Revolutionary War. When Spain's entry into the war in June 1779 reduced imports of barilla ash for bleaching, the White Linen Hall was constructed in Belfast to exert quality control over the industry because

of experiments with different bleaching agents, such as lime. The establishment of the hall in Belfast rather than Newry also had the effect of bolstering Belfast's claim as the capital of the North (Crawford 66). At the close of the 18th century trade with the West Indies counted for about 5% of Ireland's export trade, with the strength of the Irish-West Indian connection frequently demonstrated. When planters and merchants trading with Jamaica decided to raise a regiment for service there, seven Cork firms were among the subscribers (Crawford 66). In fact, the desire for direct trade with the West Indies was one of the issues which led to the Irish free trade crisis in 1778-79. (O'Connell 131, 156) Ironically, considering that Irish had been among the slaves in the Caribbean during the 17th century, by the late 18th century wealthy Irish entrepreneurs, such as Waddell Cunningham, sought to enter the West Indian (slave) trade. Envying the merchants of Bristol and Liverpool who dominated the English slave trade, in 1786 Cunningham arranged a meeting with other Belfast merchants to draw up a prospectus for "a company of slaveship trading." Thomas McCabe, a local jeweler and member of the United Irishmen, protested, stating: "May God wither the hand and consign the name to eternal infamy of the man who will sign that document." The threat worked and Belfast never again was drawn so directly into the slave trade (Rolston, *ibid*.).

According to the Treaty of Versailles (1783), Florida and Cuba were ceded by the English to the Spanish in exchange for the Bahamas, which had been captured by a combined American and Spanish force in 1781. Many of the Loyalists from Georgia and the Carolinas, who had moved to Florida during the war, left soon after for the Bahamas along with their families and slaves to establish plantations there. Between 1784 and 1789 the population more than doubled, going from 4,055 (1,722 whites and 2,333 people of color, many of whom were free), to a population of 9,296 (3,100 whites with 5,696 slaves and 500 people of color) (Wylly 5-6). The bulk of the population settled on New Providence Island, though some attempted to establish plantations on the "out islands," such as Abaco and Andros. Among the Loyalists, several appear to have been of Scottish or Irish descent, including John O'Halloran (from Georgia), owner of nine slaves, who became postmaster and a member of the Assembly; Henry Glenton (from N.Y.), a planter and provost with six slaves and a small vessel; and John Jordan, an Irish native who had lived in N.J and N.Y. before becoming Director of Ironworks on Abaco (Wylly 18; Riley 250 n. 32, 270-73). Eventually, two factions developed and the newcomers, called Refugees, wrested control of the Assembly from the old inhabitants, whom they called "Conks," (Kelly *apud* Saunders 32) from their preference for the prevalent shellfish conch (cf. the name "Conchy Joe" for modern-day white Bahamians). Unfortunately, once again the arid climate and thin soil led to the failure of many plantations, and the settlers turned to the sea for their livelihood as had their predecessors.

Bahamian antagonism towards both new Irish settlers and to the American government at this period is revealed in the following anecdote: in 1788 a group of Irish "vagrants" were set ashore on one of the uninhabited islands, from whence they journeyed to New Providence. They found employment for some months, "but returning to their

old courses," they began to bother the inhabitants and many were prosecuted "for different felonies" by the Attorney-General. As he could find no indictment upon which any of them could be hanged, the Governor ordered them arrested, chartered a vessel and shipped them off to the American states. It happened that a baker in Nassau had an Irish apprentice, named Thomas Flynn. Unfortunately, his name was very similar to one whose name appeared in the arrest warrant, Thomas Glynn. The officer, thinking some mistake had been made and that both should be arrested, placed Thomas Flynn in jail as well, and eventually he was also deported "as a present to the Congress." (Wylly 42-43).

Regarding the continuation of Irish culture and speech in the Caribbean during the 19th and 20th centuries, there is strong evidence for survival particularly in the Leeward Islands, especially Montserrat which, as we have seen, had the highest percentage of Irish immigrants in the 17th century. For example, under 1 April 1831, Humphrey O'Sullivan (Amhlaoibh ó Súilleabháin) wrote in his diary:

> I hear that Irish is the mother tongue in Montserrat... since the time of Cromwell who transported some Irish people... Irish is spoken commonly there by both whites and blacks (Bhaldraithe 103-04).

A letter from Cork, dated 27 June 1905, written by W. F. Butler, quotes a Mr. C. Cremen, Cork Harbour Commissioners' Office, corroborating this statement:

> There is an old saying among our Cork sailors of the old sailing-vessel days, 'In Mont-serrat, where the blacks speak Irish'. He (Cremen) goes on to speak of the great trade in the old days between Cork and the West Indies, of his personal knowledge of many of the sailors,...(including) John Donovan... a native of Ring, near Clonakilty,... (who) spoke Irish very fluently. He frequently told me that in the year 1852, when mate of the brig Kaloola, he went ashore on the island of Montserrat... He said he was much surprised to hear the negroes actually talking Irish among themselves, and that he joined in the conversation... the sailor told the negro he came from Cork, and the black answered, "She sin Corcaig na g'cuan". i.e., "That is Cork of the Harbours" [based on a popular Irish song]... (Bhaldraithe n. 20, 103-04).

Irish speech appears to have continued in Montserrat into the 20th century (one of my black students at Harvard in the early 1980s said her grandfather had spoken Irish), but it seems to have now died out. However, other cultural elements survive, such as the St. Patrick's Day celebrations and the use of the shamrock as a national symbol, indicating a continuing memory of the Irish contributions to the island's culture.

## Notes

1 This paper was originally read at the IASIL (International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures) meeting at the National University of Ireland, Cork, in July 1995. Since then other studies on specific aspects of Irish emigration to the Caribbean have been published, such as Donald Akenson's *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). However, this essay still stands as an overview of the topic.

2 London, 1879, cited in "A Tale of Two Cities," *Bahamas Islander Magazine* 1 (1994): 40.

3 See my essay, "The Scotch-Irish and the Formation of a Celtic Southern Culture in the 18th and 19th Centuries," in *Scotch-Irish and Hiberno-English Language and Culture.* Ft. Lauderdale: Nova Southeastern University, Working Papers in Irish Studies, 1993. 93-3, 1-11.

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