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## Irish Iowa

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*Irish Iowa*, by Timothy Walch. American Heritage Series. Mount Pleasant, SC: The History Press, 2019. 144 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.99 paperback.

Reviewer R. Douglas Hurt is professor of history at Purdue University. His latest book is *Food and Agriculture during the Civil War* (2016).

The history of Irish emigration to the United States has emphasized poverty, desperation, and want. We know about the lives of the Irish immigrants living in tenement houses, working in factories, and building canals and railroads. We know that they tended to remain in the eastern cities where they secured what they deemed essential for a good life—steady jobs and regular paychecks. We know less about the Irish-born men, women, and children who ventured to the Midwest seeking a better life. Timothy Walch, a longtime student and benefactor of Irish studies in the region, helps us better understand the lives and accomplishments of the Irish who settled in Iowa during the nineteenth century and who gave it an important cultural stamp by the early twenty-first century.

Walch traces the Irish contribution to Iowa's history in nine brief chapters that provide a good introduction to the Irish experience. He argues that Iowa's rich lands lured them. He makes the important point that, prior to the famine of 1845–1847, most Irish immigrants arrived via New Orleans, then traveled up the Mississippi River to their destination, usually Dubuque, Davenport, or Burlington. Walch also discusses the role of the Catholic church and the work of Bishops Mathias Loras, Clement Smyth, and John Hennessy as well as the priests who provided the Irish with the security and comfort of their religion. He evaluates the role of the Irish women who established homes in the towns and countryside as well as founded orders of religious women. Walch notes the settlement and occupations of the Irish immigrants in the cities along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. His discussion includes discrimination by the Know Nothing Party during the 1850s, the Protective Association (which was established in Clinton) during the 1890s, and the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s. Walch surveys Irish nationalism in Iowa during the early twentieth century and considers Irish voters' dilemma during the presidential election of 1928 that pitted the Catholic Al Smith against native son Herbert Hoover. He touches on the effects of the Great Depression and World War II on Irish communities and concludes with an overview of cultural persistence, particularly in the form of celebrations on St. Patrick's Day.

Brief overviews intended for general readers often provide a good place to begin more in-depth scholarly work, and Walch meets that goal. By doing so, he helps us ask questions that are more detailed.

After the famine, for example, Irish-born farm men and women who arrived from the East had made several stops before permanently settling in midwestern states. Most had acquired American farming skills and accumulated a cash reserve to purchase land and support themselves until they could raise crops for livestock and sale. Walch's study encourages us to ask whether this trend applied to Iowa as it did to Minnesota and Nebraska. Moreover, did the clergy primarily encourage immigrants from the eastern cities to settle in Iowa? Or did they seek those who arrived directly from Ireland? Why did the bishops forgo attempts at organized colonization after the famine? Was it a matter of insufficient land, money, or interest? Who came to Iowa in terms of gender and age?

Walch's study encourages us to ask other questions. He notes that Irish women immigrants were opportunists, not victims. They had the physical and mental strength to leave Ireland forever and create a new life. Who were they? In the absence of letters and diaries, what can census records tell us about them? The Sisters of Mercy made a major contribution to health care, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary operated a parish school in Dubuque. What can we learn about their work in terms of medical care and curriculum? Moreover, since the Irish primarily lived in Iowa's cities, did they come to dominate city services and government?

Although never the predominant immigrant group in Iowa, the Irish, like others, saw Iowa as a place to begin anew. Their footprint remains on the state's history from Loras College in Dubuque and St. Ambrose University in Davenport to abandoned railroad trestles and heritage farms. Walch's brief survey of the Irish in Iowa is intended for the state's history enthusiasts and readers of Irish heritage. The subject awaits other scholars to provide details and qualifications.

*Masters of the Middle Waters: Indian Nations and Colonial Ambitions along the Mississippi*, by Jacob F. Lee. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. 360 pp. 11 photos, 4 maps, notes, index. \$39.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert Michael Morrissey is associate professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (2015).

*Masters of the Middle Waters* is a major contribution to the colonial and indigenous history of Iowa and the Midwest generally. The title is an adaptation of an ethnonym, *Ni-u-kon-ska*, by which Osage people once knew themselves, and which translated to "Children of the Middle