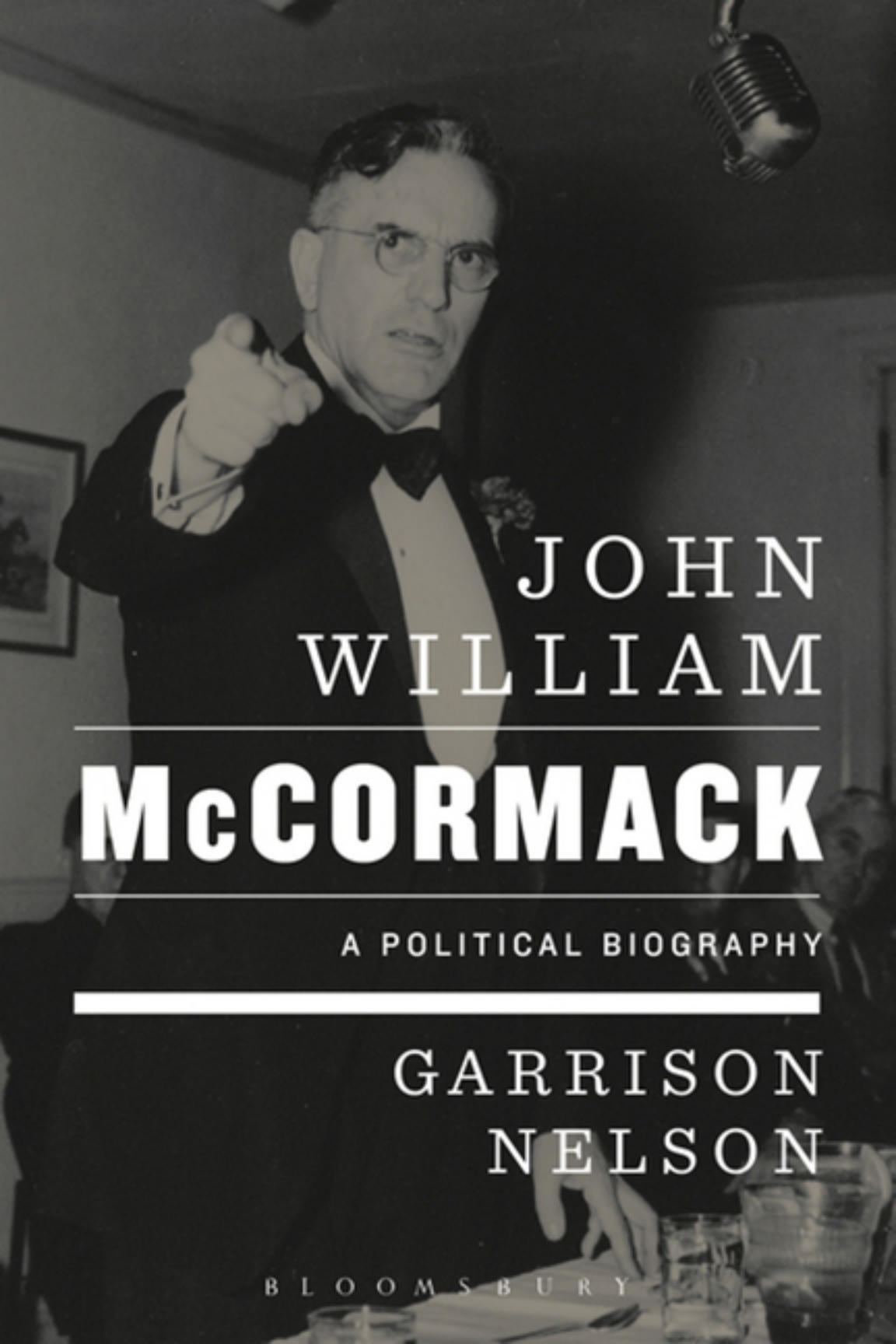

JOHN WILLIAM McCORMACK

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

GARRISON NELSON

BLOOMSBURY

John William McCormack

John William McCormack

A Political Biography

Garrison Nelson

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Acknowledgments

In 1968, I left graduate school at the University of Iowa and was hired by the University of Vermont (UVM) shortly after the birth of my daughter, Shyla. UVM has been my academic home for close to five decades. In September that year, I attended my first national meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, DC. On Friday of the Labor Day weekend, I went to the U.S. Capitol in hopes of arranging meetings with congressional leaders who were the subjects of my doctoral dissertation. In a surprisingly fortuitous circumstance, Speaker of the U.S. House John W. McCormack was not only in his office but I was granted an hour-long meeting with him. As we sat in his office, I rattled off the names of prominent members with whom he served—Cactus Jack Garner, Will Bankhead, Sam Rayburn, and Billy Connery from my hometown of Lynn, Massachusetts, who had been McCormack's closest friend in the state delegation. He was delighted to be asked about these people and as he reminisced, he offered me a cigar. It was a wonderful hour for this 26-year-old new college instructor to enjoy a good smoke with the 76-year-old House Speaker in the U.S. Capitol. This remarkable experience was the inspiration for this particular book as well as for most of my published research on the U.S. Congress.

This book is the first ever full-length biography of John W. McCormack, 1891–1980, who at the time of his death weeks from his 89th birthday was then the second longest-lived Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. McCormack was one of the very few political leaders who openly resisted a biography written about him even going so far as to repeatedly warn his office staff about preparing a manuscript of their service with him. As Dr. Martin Sweig, his longtime assistant once contended to me, "John McCormack was the most secretive man I ever met." Consequently, the search for sources documenting his life and political career had to go well beyond his apparently sanitized congressional papers located at Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center. Also presenting a problem was trying to interview McCormack's key constituents, the South Boston Irish, who honored the code most succinctly stated by Martin Lomasney, the political boss of Boston's polyglot West End: "Never write what you can speak; never speak what you can nod." During the many months that I lived in South Boston and on my frequent trips to that unique peninsula as well as the Prince Edward Island birthplace of John's Canadian Scottish father, I learned many McCormack family stories whose sources refused to let me name them in print. Most of the stories were benign but they were too good to leave out of the book and so they are included in spite of many not being fully fact-checked. Without sounding too ominous, there is no one more wholly disdained among the Irish than the informer.

The two people who most encouraged my work on John McCormack were Edward J. "Eddie" McCormack, Jr., the Speaker's nephew and onetime attorney general of

Massachusetts, and Dr. Howard Gotlieb, the founder-director of Boston University's renowned Gotlieb Archival Research Center, where John McCormack's Papers were stored. Howard was a friend of my father's and was delighted that I had chosen to write about McCormack. Howard's staff associates Charles Niles, Vita Paladino, and Sean Noel were unstintingly supportive of my efforts to wade through the thousands of McCormack documents in their collection. Also, Eddie McCormack gave me six boxes of material—family photographs, personal letters, news clippings, and gavels—that were not included in the BU files. It was there I found documents and letters that unlocked John McCormack's hidden past. It was the successful reinvention of his family history that made it possible for John to escape the twin cruelties of abject childhood poverty and deadly disease that shortened the lives of five siblings and his beloved mother enabling him to ascend politically to the Speakership of the U.S. House just one heartbeat away from the presidency between November 1963 and January 1965.

Two other researchers whose prior work has been invaluable were Dr. Lester Gordon, whose BU dissertation *John McCormack and the Roosevelt Era* was distilled from hours of taped interviews with McCormack, and Mr. Paul Wright of the University of Massachusetts-Boston, whose copious notes and interviews with McCormack relatives and South Boston associates provided much context for this narrative. Close McCormack friends Mr. Bill McSweeny and his wife Dorothy also interviewed John and their tapes are at the Gotlieb Center. Eileen Hanerfeld Crosby ably prepared the transcripts from the Lester Gordon and McSweeny tapes. John was both very voluble and concealing in his interviews. He could talk at length about a topic yet reveal very little about it. Noticing this tendency was none other than his favorite protégé Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr. who described John as "a windbag" after their initial meeting. John mentored Tip's career and was pleased when Tip joined the House leadership in 1971 upon John's retirement and eventually became House Majority Leader, 1973–77, and Speaker, 1977–87. John McCormack's unique self-effacing personality allowed him to hide "in plain sight," avoiding public scrutiny as he attended to the nation's business.

In the course of researching the book, I was aided by the highly competent staffs of four Presidential Libraries and Museums: the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, NY; the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri; the John F. Kennedy Library in Dorchester, Massachusetts; and the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. Congressional libraries that were especially valuable were the Carl Albert Congressional Research Center at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, and the Richard W. Bolling Papers at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. I also visited the Joseph W. Martin Papers at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts, and Tip O'Neill's Papers at Boston College. Knowledgeable archivists are the salvation of a biographer without whose assistance any researcher would drown in the enormity of the papers contained in these collections. Three in particular deserve special mention, Bob Clark at the Roosevelt Library, Steven Plotkin at the Kennedy Library, and Carolyn G. Hanneman at the Albert Center. The able staffs of the U.S. Senate Historical Office, the U.S. House Historical Office, as well as longtime friends at the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress helped fill in missing details about a man whose congressional career spanned 42 years. Special mention should be made of

Mr. Waldron Leard of Joe McCormack's hometown of Souris, PEI, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Canada's smallest province was invaluable to my understanding of the unique relationship between the Canadian Maritimes and New England.

I learned of the importance of mentorship as an undergraduate at Boston University where I was mentored by Professor Murray B. Levin and in graduate school at the University of Iowa by Professors Sam Patterson and John C. Wahlke. It is a central tenet of a successful life as well as an academic career. My research was facilitated by an extraordinary cadre of UVM undergraduate mentees. Among them, I would list Alana Chain, Brad Carlson, and Heather Purdie, who provided assistance at critical points in the research. Seven students in particular stand out: Maggie Taylor Steakley, who mined the Kennedy Library for thousands of pages of oral history documents; Alexandra Gero, who photocopied thousands of pages of the *Congressional Record* in search of relevant John McCormack remarks; Jade Harberg, whose careful reading of documents could find the most illuminating quotes; Lindsey Nelson, who created the photo record of McCormack's life and career that has been invaluable in public presentations of this research; Liz Kane, whose organizational skills produced order from the disorder of multiple hundreds of file folders of 20-plus years of research; and Katie Alexander, who read through thousands of pages of newspaper accounts to provide the contemporaneous scaffolding for the book's narrative. This past year, the book was completed thanks to the determination of Sophie Scharlin-Pettee, who oversaw the book's final rewrite with clarity and insight, and Brenna Marie Rosen, who helped tighten the final editing and prepared the book's mammoth bibliography. The wonderful intelligence and good humor of Sophie and Brenna were essential to the completion of the manuscript as I tried to juggle my multiple responsibilities of classroom instruction and political commentary.

While I funded most of the book personally, I was aided by timely grants from the Earhart Foundation in Michigan, the Carl Albert Center at the University of Oklahoma, and the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum. The most recent source of funding came this past year from the generous endowment of UVM alumnus Elliott A. Brown, whose memories of the wonderful mentoring that he received from many of the UVM colleagues with whom I taught in my early years on campus enabled us to establish an intergenerational bridge of mentoring that I have been able to extend into this present generation of UVM students.

Any research project that extends beyond 20 years could not be completed had it not been for the information and sage counsel of multiple individuals. Listed here are many of the individuals with whom I spoke during the two decades that I worked irregularly on this book regarding John McCormack's life and political career as well as those who provided information and advice on how best to present the relevant materials. Undoubtedly, there are many others who provided valuable insights for the book but whose names have been lost to memory. A number of the interviews were formal, but most of the others, especially those at professional meetings or in telephone calls and e-mails, were more conversational. Among those with whom I spoke were: Tyler Abell, Professor Scott Adler, Jack Anderson, Professor Samuel Beer, Dr. Richard Baker, Professor Edmund Beard, Hon. Francis X. Bellotti, Richard Ben-Veniste, Professor

Steven D. Berkowitz, Gerald A. Berlin, Hon. Richard W. Bolling, Professor David W. Brady, Dr. W. Ross Brewer, Professor Frank Bryan, Gerry Burke, Hon. William M. Bulger, Professor James McGregor Burns, Canadian Consulate—Boston, Cecelia Cancellaro, Robert A. Caro, Professor Anthony Champagne, Christine Chinlund, Robert (Bob) Clark, Adam Clymer, Ellen Coffey, Hon. Tom Costin, Professor R. Bruce Craig, Professor William Crotty, Maryann McLeod Crush, Professor Maurice Cunningham, Professor Robert Dallek, Professor Roger Davidson, Terry Dean, Professor Bruce J. Dierenfield, Hon. Gerard F. Doherty, Hon. Michael S. Dukakis, Professor Susan Dunn, Hon. Thomas H. Eliot, Michael Esslinger, Professor Richard Fenno, Finn Galloway-Kane, Professor Gregory Gause, Hon. Newton L. Gingrich, Dr. Howard Gotlieb, Professor Matthew Green, Hon. Harry F. Greene, Professor Samuel B. Hand, D. B. Hardeman, Professor Douglas B. Harris, Robert (Bob) Healy, Professor Raul Hilberg, Professor Richard Hogarty, Gary Hymel, Ira Jackson, Ambrose Joyce, Professor Morton Keller, Professor David King, Dr. Betty Koed, Hon. Thomas Kuchel, Albert LaFarge, John C. Lally, Waldron Leard, Hon. Patrick J. Leahy, Scott Lehigh, Professor Burdett Loomis, Scot MacKay, Ralph G. Martin, Harvey Matusow, Professor David Mayhew, Hon. Edward J. McCormack Jr., Edward J. McCormack III, Hon. John W. McCormack, Sean McCormack, Marlaine McLean, William (Bill) McSweeny, Bruce Meredith, Metropolitan Opera Company in New York City, Mary Ellen McWalters Melder, Hon. Wilbur D. Mills, John Monahan, Ken Moody, Anna Murphy, Charles Niles, Sean Noel, Professor Thomas H. O'Connor, Padraig O'Malley, Hon. Thomas P. O'Neill, III, Dr. Norman Ornstein, Rev. Art O'Shea, Vita Paladino, Professor Samuel C. Patterson, Professor Robert L. Peabody, Professor Ronald M. Peters, Jr., Andrew Pierce, Professor Nelson Polsby, Professor James Riddlesperger, Jr., Clay Risen, Dr. Donald Ritchie, W. R. Rohrbaugh, Paul Rundquist, Professor Larry Sabato, Dr. David B. Sacher, Professor Howard Sacher, Hon. Thomas P. Salmon, John Sears, Professor Charles Stewart III, Professor Mark Stoler, James Sundquist, Dr. Martin Sweig, Dr. Raymond Smock, Professor Benn Steil, Carol Tank-Day, Sharon Tomasello, Celeste Walsh, Professor Thomas Whalen, Dr. George Abbott White, Professor Robert C. Wood, Dr. Robert Woodbury, Hon. Jim Wright, Paul Wright, and Professor Julian Zelizer.

Special thanks are extended to Matthew Kopel who signed my prior book, *Pathways to the U.S. Supreme Court: From the Arena to the Monastery* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and as an acquisitions editor for Bloomsbury obtained a contract for this manuscript. He never lost faith in the book even when I felt overwhelmed by its enormity and wished to walk from it.

To my longtime partner and extraordinary companion Rosemary Malone, my beloved children, Shyla and Ethan, and my adored grandchildren Emily, Sophia, Addie, and Chase, I offer this book in heartfelt thanks for your loving support.

1

November 27, 1963: The Troubling Public Introduction

Three dates are embedded deep in the memory of Americans. Two led to the enormous loss of American lives: December 7, 1941, "the day of infamy," when Japanese warplanes attacked the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, ending the lives of 2,400 Americans and wounding another 1,100; and September 11, 2001, when nineteen Islamic terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and flew three of them into the World Trade Center Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, with a total death toll of 3,000. The Pearl Harbor attack led to World War II. The 9/11 attack prompted the international "war on terrorism."

The third date, November 22, 1963, did not claim thousands of lives, nor did it lead to armed conflict. It did, however, have an equally devastating impact. On that date in Dallas, Texas, 46-year-old President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the nation's youngest elected president, became the fourth American president to be murdered in less than a century. Fifty years after his death, conspiracy theories abound as many Americans continue to be confounded as to how this young, vibrant leader of the world's most powerful nation could have been felled by a single misfit loner with a mail-order rifle.

Much American innocence was lost as a result of the Kennedy assassination; the emotional damage to the nation remains incalculable. But the nation would go on. The Founding Fathers had prepared for these circumstances with the vice presidency. And for the eighth time in American history, a vice president assumed the presidential mantle following the death of a predecessor. President Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, with 27 combined years as a U.S. Representative, a U.S. Senator, and Vice President, was the most politically experienced of the successor presidents. The nation was only thirteen months away from the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that placed millions of Americans at risk of nuclear annihilation. The hope was that President Johnson would assuage those fears and bring a calming presence to the anxious American people.

When President Johnson addressed Congress on November 27, five days after the murder and a day after the burial, a disquieting picture emerged. Seated behind Johnson were two very old white men. To the President's left was seated the 86-year-old U.S. Senator Carl Hayden (Dem-Ariz.), the President pro tempore of the Senate and second in line to President Johnson. To his right was U.S. Representative John W. McCormack (Dem-Mass.), the Speaker of the U.S. House and next in line to President Johnson with

Figure 1.1 President Lyndon Johnson's first address to Congress on November 27, 1963, with U.S. House Speaker John McCormack (Dem-Mass.) on the president's right and Senate President pro tem Carl Hayden (Dem-Ariz.) on his left (U.S. House Historian's Office).

only two weeks to his 72nd birthday (Figure 1.1). Their places in the line of succession had been established in the Presidential Succession Act of 1947,[1] a measure for which both had voted 16 years earlier, but neither hoped would ever be used.

Senator Hayden entered the Congress during the Taft Administration as Arizona's first elected U.S. Representative in 1912, the year it joined the Union. Hayden left the House for the Senate in 1927 and served in that chamber until 1969, when he retired at the age of 91. Speaker McCormack was first elected to the House in 1928 during the closing days of the Coolidge Administration and served until 1971 when he retired at the midpoint of President Richard Nixon's first term at the age of 79.

Standing before them was Lyndon Johnson, who had served with both men in their respective chambers—12 years for each. Although only 55, President Johnson suffered from a well-known heart condition which had kept him out of the 1956 presidential nominating contest. It was a condition that would end his life in 1973 at 64. The widely circulated photograph of Speaker McCormack and Senator Hayden seemed to represent the ghosts of "Congress Past." But they were now the ghosts of Congress Present and, most likely, Congress Yet-to-Come. In an effort to diminish the likelihood of either of these two gaining the presidency through the legislated line of succession, a constitutional amendment was proposed by Senator Birch Bayh (Dem-Ind.), entitled the "Presidential Succession and Disability Amendment." This amendment would allow the Congress to fill the vice presidency if it became vacant and to limit the operation of the 1947 Presidential Succession Act which placed the Speaker and the Senate's President pro tempore right behind the Vice President. To hammer home his point about the necessity of the amendment, the fateful 1963 photograph graced the cover of Senator Bayh's book *One Heartbeat Away*.[2]

Senator Bayh's proposal was successful and the 25th Amendment was ratified on February 23, 1967, one year and ten months after Congress had approved it and sent it to the states for ratification. The time it took to move through the state legislatures was close to the median of other constitutional amendments. The photograph had alerted the nation, but it had not panicked it.

With the solution approved, Senator Hayden was spared further speculation about his fitness for the presidency; however, Speaker McCormack was not so fortunate. Questions about his fitness continued to dog his speakership and he had to defend himself for much of his time in the chair as efforts to oust him surfaced during his years as Speaker.[3]

A private man in public life

From 1962 through 1970, Boston's John W. McCormack served as the 44th Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was a major legislative architect of both the New Deal and the Great Society. Forty-six years have passed since he left the House in 1971 and more than 30 years since his death in 1980. If he remains relatively unknown, that was his plan.

John McCormack was a very private man in a public office. In the words of his longtime Administrative Assistant Dr. Martin Sweig, "John McCormack was the most secretive man I have ever met."[4] Why?

The Austin-Boston Speakers: From 1940 through 1989, the U.S. House of Representatives had only six Speakers—Sam Rayburn, Joe Martin, John McCormack, Carl Albert, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., and Jim Wright. Five were Democrats; only Joe Martin was a Republican. Three came from Massachusetts, two from Texas, and Carl Albert came from an Oklahoma district just across the Red River from Rayburn's.[5] During this same half-century, there were ten presidents and six Chief Justices of the Supreme Court. The presidents were born in eight different states and elected from nine of them. The Chief Justices were born in six different ones and chosen from five. The Speakers were born in four states and elected from only three. That an elected political institution with the shortest fixed term of any national legislature would have so few presiding officers is not the least of the House leadership's many ironies. That a national political institution with a constitutionally mandated requirement that its membership reflect population shifts in that nation should have been presided over by members from only three of the nation's fifty states enriches the irony. And that the one Speaker, John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, whose leadership in that body spanned over 30 years during that half-century remains unknown to the American public turns irony to mystery.

In the years between 1940, when John McCormack was first elected House Majority Leader, and 2016, twelve different individuals have held the office of Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. As the first public officer listed in the Constitution, the Speaker matters. Thus, it is not surprising that multiple books have been written about the occupants of the Speaker's chair. Eleven of the last twelve Speakers from Democrat

Sam Rayburn of Texas to Republican Paul Ryan of Wisconsin have been the subjects of biographies and autobiographies. Twenty-four biographies and autobiographies alone cover the lives and public careers of five Austin-Boston Speakers with nine on Sam Rayburn,[6] seven on Jim Wright,[7] five on Tip O'Neill,[8] two on Joe Martin,[9] and one on Carl Albert.[10] But there are none on John McCormack.

The forgotten speakership

John McCormack, who held the speakership for nine years, is the lone exception. Is it because he was unimportant and irrelevant to the politics of his time? No. It is because he chose not to share the full dimensions of his life that we know so little. Four reasons would seem to account for his lack of public attention.

1. *He did not want to be Speaker*: In an April 1977 interview, McCormack told me that he preferred being Majority Leader working the floor and assembling voting coalitions than presiding at a distance from the Speaker's chair.[11] In a postscript to a letter to H. G. Dulaney, Sam Rayburn's former secretary, McCormack wrote in 1967, six years after Sam's death, "I miss very much our late friend, Speaker Sam Rayburn. I wish he was here—he as Speaker and I as Majority Leader."[12]

2. *He was too deferential to the presidency*: McCormack's relationship to the presidency was reactive, not proactive. He saw his speakership as providing support for presidential initiatives. Presidential support scores on House floor votes during the nine years of John's speakership are the highest among the eleven Speakers who have served in the 60-plus years since 1953 when *Congressional Quarterly* began calculating that factor. The House's average presidential support score during John's nine years as Speaker was 84.2%–84.0% for his two years with Kennedy (1962–63); 86.5% for his five years with Johnson (1964–68); and 78.4% for his two years with Republican Nixon (1969–70).[13] Johnson's success rate in the House was so high that conservative columnist Robert Novak contended that Speaker McCormack was virtually on Johnson's staff.[14]

Washington State's Tom Foley, who served as Majority Whip, 1981–87, and became the first post–Austin-Boston Speaker in 1989, recalled that "Speaker John McCormack made only marginally more use of the Whip [than Rayburn] and the White House congressional liaison staff performed most of the vote-counting function during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations."[15]

That may account for the high regard that John received from Democratic Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson. However, it placed the House in a subordinate role and not the coequal one envisioned by the framers of the Constitution, who gave the all-important taxing power to the House.

3. *He was overshadowed in Boston*: John McCormack's career was intertwined for years with fellow Boston Irish-descended political leaders, all of whom were far more colorful than he, most notably his semi-mentor, Boston Mayor James Michael

Curley, his protégé Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., and the powerful and glamorous Fitzgerald-Kennedy clan of Mayor John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, President John F. Kennedy, and U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy. All cast huge shadows over both the Boston and national landscapes. The most succinct depiction of the relationship appeared as an aside in Rose Kennedy's memoirs, "The Fitzgeralds, Kennedys, and McCormacks had had many encounters in Massachusetts' political life: usually as friends, sometimes as foes, sometimes friendly enemies."[16]

Jack Kennedy's assassination created a martyrdom that has elevated his presidential reputation high in the estimation of both historians and the general public. In Boston, he was a secular saint. Consequently, any criticism of Jack Kennedy, no matter how mild or innocuous, was seen as dishonoring the memory of this beloved president and would lead to vehement denunciations from the Boston Irish, the very people who John McCormack had been elected to represent.

McCormack was very reluctant to discuss the complex relationship he had with John Kennedy. Two instances stand out. In Herbert S. Parmet's second biographical volume about Kennedy, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, he quotes an unnamed historian as a "confidential source" who recounted[17]:

> One historian who interviewed McCormack shortly before his death in 1981 [*sic*] came away from that meeting and immediately recorded his observation that "when I turned to his relationship with John Kennedy . . . the change in atmosphere was quite dramatic. The speaker stiffened in his chair, his voice changed, and he became quite formal and quite strained. I knew at once that it would not be possible to probe realistically into the Kennedy-McCormack relationship. The speaker refused to discuss or even admit that any differences existed and repeatedly insisted that his ties to Kennedy were very positive. . . . It is my considered view as an historian that Speaker McCormack's response demonstrated that his relationship with John Kennedy was charged with tension, which, for personal and other reasons, the speaker does not intend to discuss or document."

Similarly, Lester Gordon, a Boston University graduate student hired by the university in 1972 to conduct a series of hour-long oral history interviews with McCormack, had the following exchange on his Tape 15. After John had provided an extensive and detailed answer describing the role of the relatively unimportant General Services Administration, Gordon prefaced his next question with, "The next time we meet in a couple of weeks, we'll talk about Kennedy's administration."[18]

McCormack responded, "Who?"

The interview ended and there was never another one.

4. *He did not want a biography*: John McCormack limited the number of his papers donated to the Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University. Only the post-1950 papers have any completeness about them. The inference is that John's nephew and former Massachusetts Attorney General Eddie McCormack, an alumnus of BU

Law, and Dr. Martin Sweig, his chief of staff who spent time in prison for perjury, "sanitized" the files. The remaining papers are well catalogued but bereft of the extensive and candid correspondence found in the papers of other congressional luminaries with whom he served, like his allies Sam Rayburn (at the Rayburn Library in Bonham, Texas) and Carl Albert (at the University of Oklahoma), and his longtime liberal adversary Richard W. Bolling (at the University of Missouri-Kansas City). Furthermore, John's oral histories tend to be overlong and dissembling. He preferred to talk around questions rather than address them directly.

It was during the early 1970s while BU was completing John's documentary record that his beloved South Boston erupted in nationally publicized white opposition to the racial integration of its public schools. Leaders of the vocal opposition were two of South Boston's most powerful politicians: Boston School Committee member Louise Day Hicks, who would succeed John as the U.S. Representative of the 9th Massachusetts District, and State Senator William M. "Billy" Bulger, a protégé of John's brother Edward, best known as "Knocko" McCormack. South Boston, then the city's least diverse and most defensive of its ethnic enclaves, wanted no further scrutiny.

Lastly, John McCormack, who had successfully reinvented himself as the oldest son of a poor, widowed Irish mother, knew that his backstory might be revealed so he chose to hide in plain sight, with a conscious effort to be the least interesting major political figure of his time. There were serious personal reasons why he chose to operate in this self-effacing manner and these will be explored in this book, but his life and career are far too important to remain in the shadows of history.

John McCormack "in the room"

For almost 40 years, McCormack was near the epicenter of political power in the nation. The most fascinating aspect of his life is not his oft-told "rags-to-riches," Horatio Alger–like rise from the South Boston Irish tenements to the Speaker's chair on Capitol Hill,[19] but the fact that he was "in the room" for so many major political events which altered the course of American life.

—1928: McCormack was elected to the House to fill the unexpired term of the late Representative James A. Gallivan (Dem-Mass.) and to the subsequent term. He would win 22 consecutive elections to Congress.

—1931: With the support of newly installed Speaker John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner of Texas, McCormack was elected to the Ways and Means Committee. At this time, the Democratic members of Ways and Means served as "the committee on committees" for other Democrats. McCormack finished second among the members elected to the new vacancies, ahead of Fred Vinson (Dem-Ky.), who would later become Secretary of the Treasury and Chief Justice of the United States. Fred Vinson was a "poker pal" of McCormack.[20]

—1933: FDR's New Deal measures moved quickly through the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee on which McCormack was a member. These were the legendary "100 days."

—1934: The House named its first Special Committee on Un-American Activities to investigate fascist and communist movements. McCormack was chosen as chair with Sam Dickstein (Dem-NY) as vice chair.[21] Not known at the time was that Dickstein was on the payroll of the Soviet Embassy where he was referred to as "crook."[22] It was this committee that exposed the so-called businessmen's plot to overthrow FDR.

—1937: Commerce Committee Chair Sam Rayburn (Dem-Texas), a New Deal supporter, was elected House Majority Floor Leader over Rules Committee Chair John J. O'Connor (Dem-NY), a New Deal opponent, with the help of northern urban Catholic votes provided by McCormack.[23]

—1940: Working closely with conservative Virginia Representative Howard W. Smith, McCormack helped write the controversial Alien Registration Act, known as the "Smith Act." This act required all foreigners to register and be fingerprinted. It also made it unlawful to be a member of any organization that advocated the overthrow of the government by force or violence, or to advocate or conspire to advocate such overthrow.[24]

—1940: Sam Rayburn succeeded the deceased Will Bankhead (Dem-Ala.) as Speaker and McCormack succeeded Rayburn as House Majority Floor Leader. McCormack defeated Clifton Woodrum (Dem-Va.) in the Democratic Caucus with the help of FDR Cabinet Secretaries Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes and led by Eugene "Goober" Cox (Dem-Ga.), an avowed segregationist.[25] Cox was another "poker pal" of McCormack. Once elected, Rayburn and McCormack served as the House's top two Democrats for 21 years and never had a vote recorded against them.

—1941: Newly elected Majority Leader McCormack was assigned by President Roosevelt to be the House Floor Manager for the $7 billion dollar Lend-Lease bill that was intended to rescue Britain from the Axis powers. Fearful of anti-British sentiments among American Irish urban Democrats, McCormack's role is seen as pivotal in managing this bill through the House.[26]

—1941: Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Majority Floor Leader McCormack introduced the resolutions of war against Japan and the other Axis powers, Germany and Italy.[27]

—1944: Meeting in the office of Speaker Sam Rayburn with Minority Leader Joe Martin (Rep-Mass.), Majority Leader McCormack first learned of the Manhattan Project. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and

Director of Scientific Research Vannevar Bush briefed the House leaders and urged them to appropriate money for the atomic bomb project without public knowledge or congressional scrutiny.[28]

—1944: The Democratic National Convention renominated President Franklin Roosevelt but replaced Vice President Henry A. Wallace with U.S. Senator Harry S. Truman (Dem-Mo.). Senator Truman played poker with McCormack, who chaired the 1944 Resolutions Committee.[29]

—1945: President Franklin Roosevelt died. Vice President Harry Truman received a call from the White House while seated with Speaker Rayburn in "the Board of Education," the Speaker's Capitol Hill hideaway.[30] Truman, who enjoyed poker and bourbon, would drink with Rayburn, who didn't play cards, and play poker with McCormack, who didn't drink. While they waited for McCormack, Harry Truman was summoned to the White House to learn of FDR's fate. Later that evening McCormack and other key officials attended President Truman's swearing-in by Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone.

—1947: With the Democratic loss in 1946, McCormack was now minority whip. In this new role, he circulated a petition among House members to urge President Harry Truman to pardon ex-Representative and newly elected Boston Mayor James Michael Curley for mail fraud and enable him to leave prison to serve as mayor for the fourth time. Over eighty House members signed the petition. Only one Massachusetts Democratic member refused, and that was John F. Kennedy, who succeeded Curley in the seat.[31]

—1949: Majority Leader McCormack made possible the return of segregationist William Colmer (Dem-Miss.) to the Rules Committee in 1949 over the opposition of Speaker Rayburn. But at the same time, McCormack, whose committee service was optional, remained seated on the Expenditures Committee when it installed William Dawson of Chicago as the first ever black chair of a congressional committee. John declared that his continuance was "to show what a great pleasure it is for me to serve under him as chairman."[32] This averted a southern walkout.

—1952: U.S. Representative John F. Kennedy challenged the reelection of Republican U.S. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. of Massachusetts, who released documents indicating that John Kennedy's father, former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, was a "defeatist" and accepting of a Nazi victory in Europe. McCormack, a longtime favorite of Jewish voters, was known as "Rabbi John."[33] He campaigned vigorously for Kennedy in the Jewish wards of Boston and helped him gain a 70,000 Democratic vote plurality over Lodge in spite of General Eisenhower's 209,000 Republican vote plurality over Illinois Governor Adlai E. Stevenson.[34]

—1956: After McCormack easily won the state's presidential preference primary over Kennedy-backed Adlai Stevenson,[35] Kennedy operatives took control of the state party

away from McCormack loyalists to give Kennedy the delegation chairmanship. But it was McCormack's efforts at the Democratic National Convention that apparently undermined Kennedy's bid for the vice presidency.[36]

—1957: In October, the Soviets launched Sputnik, an earth-orbiting satellite. When a panicked American nation turned to the Congress for help, the House of Representatives created the Special Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration and named 67-year-old John McCormack as chair.[37] At the time, McCormack had yet to fly on an airplane. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson (Dem-Texas) headed the Senate's panel.

—1960: In a surprising move, McCormack was selected by Senator John F. Kennedy to manage his nomination on the convention floor. A friend to both Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, McCormack helped put together the Kennedy-Johnson ticket which won the closest election in the twentieth century and installed the nation's first Roman Catholic president. Bobby Kennedy and Sam Rayburn opposed the ticket for different reasons. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy wanted Johnson and McCormack helped deliver him to the ticket.[38]

—1961: With the final illness and eventual death of Speaker Rayburn, McCormack assumed the chair in an acting capacity. During this year Ambassador Kennedy approached John McCormack with an offer intended to gain the Senate nomination for his youngest son Teddy and a gubernatorial nomination for the Speaker's nephew Eddie.[39] The ambassador's stroke in December voided the deal.

—1962: McCormack was elected as the first Roman Catholic Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

—1962: Ted Kennedy and Eddie McCormack engaged in the fratricidal "Teddy-Eddie" contest for the Senate nomination. A bruising debate at South Boston High School led to a denunciation of Ted Kennedy by Ed McCormack. The attack backfired and Ted Kennedy gained the nomination with a two-to-one margin[40] and would serve in the U.S. Senate for 48 years.

—1963: John F. Kennedy's assassination placed 71-year-old Speaker McCormack next in line to President Lyndon Johnson for fourteen months. The prospect discomforted many Americans and the 25th Amendment, allowing the vice presidency to be filled by presidential appointment with confirmation by the Congress, was ratified quickly.

—1964: Speaker McCormack presided over the Democratic National Convention that nominated President Lyndon Johnson and U.S. Senator Hubert Humphrey (DFL-Minn.) as their ticket. Johnson and Humphrey captured 44 states and the District of Columbia with over 61% of the vote, the Democrats' highest percentage in the two-party era.[41]

—1965: Speaker McCormack presided over the House when the 1st Session of the 89th Congress gave LBJ a then record-setting 93% success rate for his Great Society legislative measures, including Medicare and Medicaid. This session rivaled 1933's "100 days" for legislative accomplishment, a time when McCormack also served.[42]

—1967: Ousted African-American U.S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell (Dem-NY) sued Speaker McCormack after being denied his seat and the chairmanship of the House Education and Labor Committee. The U.S. Supreme Court granted Powell his seat, but the House refused to let him resume his chairmanship.[43]

—1969: U.S. Representative Morris Udall (Dem-Ariz.) challenged Speaker McCormack within the Democratic Caucus. It was the first challenge to a sitting Speaker since 1923. McCormack handily won renomination in the Caucus by a vote of 178 to 62.[44]

—1970: Speaker John McCormack completed nine consecutive years as Speaker. It was the longest consecutive speakership on record until 1986 when his protégé Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. (Dem-Mass.) completed his tenth consecutive year.

The political dimension: Preserving the New Deal and containing race politics

The realization that the Supreme Court's opposition was undermining the New Deal led FDR to unveil his Court expansion plan early in 1937. With huge majorities in both the House and the Senate, FDR assumed that it would sail through the Congress. But Sam Rayburn and John McCormack were well aware that House Judiciary Chair Hatton Sumners, a longtime Texas ally, was opposed to the plan and suggested that the bill first be introduced in the Senate.[45] It was in the Senate that the bill was stymied. In December 1937, North Carolina Senator Josiah Bailey issued the "Conservative Manifesto," and with southern Senators joined by a handful of Republicans they created what would become popularly known as the Conservative Coalition.[46] Before the 75th Congress ended, an informal alliance between them was formed in both houses and the coalition brought a virtual stop to the legislative expansion of the New Deal. With economic uncertainty returning in the 1937 recession and the impending loss of dozens of House seats in the 1938 midterm election, FDR loyalists were fearful that the New Deal would crash in Congress. To protect the New Deal's gains, FDR had intervened in the 1937 Senate majority leadership contest tilting toward moderate Alben Barkley of Kentucky over conservative Pat Harrison of Mississippi.[47]

The House was another story. Anticipated losses would be heaviest in those regions of the country recently voting for Democrats in the West and the agricultural Midwest. Only the South and the big-city Democrats would likely survive the anti–New Deal backlash. Texan Sam Rayburn, the newly elected House Majority Leader, and Bostonian John McCormack, the soon-to-be chair of the Democratic Caucus, held safe seats and

were Roosevelt loyalists. They were well known to FDR's most politically savvy Cabinet members—Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, Commerce Secretary Harry Hopkins, and David K. Niles, Hopkins's assistant and longtime McCormack ally from Boston who handled political matters for the Works Progress Administration. Whether this was the original intent of the alliance can be argued, but it did prevent the Conservative Coalition from rolling back much of the New Deal's most significant gains, notably Social Security and the pro-labor Wagner-Connery National Labor Relations Act. The Rayburn-McCormack team led a "blocking" coalition that preserved the New Deal.

The Connection's later and more important impact was to help facilitate the transition of the Democratic Party from its 130-year dependence on its electoral base of white rural southern native-born voters into a more national party open to urban ethnic, religious, and racial minorities.

On the political level, the longtime Austin-Boston linkage between McCormack's Massachusetts and Rayburn's Texas was no surprise. Texas is the largest southern state with the smallest black population and Boston is the largest northern city with the smallest black population. Southerners with few blacks in their districts did not have to engage in racist posturing. This made it possible for them to have friends who were Catholic, Jewish, liberal, northern, and even black. They could deal with the disparate elements of the Democratic coalition without an electoral backlash in their districts.[48]

Boston is the northern urban analogue of this phenomenon. The decade-ending censuses of the 1950s and 1960s revealed that Boston ranked 12th in the 1960 Census and 11th in the 1970 Census regarding the proportion of blacks in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas' (SMSA) "core city" of the twelve largest SMSAs in the country.[49] These were the decades of McCormack's power. Without a sizable number of blacks in their districts, Boston-area Representatives were not obliged to become advocates for civil rights issues. As Martin Sweig recalled, "John McCormack never made a civil rights speech, but he always voted for civil rights bills."[50] Voting for civil rights bills would not have antagonized the South, but speaking for civil rights would have.

Boston-area members were able to accommodate some of the more vocal and vehement racists that have sat in the House. John McCormack's best friend in the House was Eugene "Goober" Cox of Georgia, a leading segregationist. "We never agreed on anything," McCormack recounted, "but he was a damn good pal."[51]

In the 1948 Democratic National Convention and the general election, the Democratic Party confronted the political ramifications of the race crisis head on. Following the passage of a pro–civil rights plank to the Democratic platform, dozens of angry white southern Democrats left the convention to nominate Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as the presidential nominee of the States Rights Party, best known as the "Dixiecrats." With Thurmond's hard-core segregationists out of the Democratic Party, liberals and urban blacks renewed their commitment to the party and President Harry Truman was elected in his own right.

This made continuing the balancing act between the white South and urban blacks even more imperative. It was John McCormack who adjusted the balance by making possible the return of segregationist William Colmer of Mississippi to the Rules

Committee in 1949 over the opposition of Speaker Sam Rayburn.[52] But it was also John McCormack, as majority leader that same year, whose decision to remain seated on the Expenditures Committee headed off a southern walkout when William Dawson of Chicago was installed as the first ever black chair of a congressional committee. The message was simple: If the majority leader had no problem with a black chairing his committee, why should anyone else have a problem with it?

McCormack was able to manage this balancing act because he was in a position to negotiate with southern hard-liners without fear of electoral retribution back home. It was the ability to finesse the race issue that made the original "Austin-Boston connection" of Rayburn and McCormack so powerful. This was because it was (and is) the race issue, more than any other, that has disrupted the Democratic Party.

Presidential politics within the Democratic Party have been plagued by race issues as well.[53] It was race that forced Democratic nominating conventions to adopt the "two-thirds rule" for selecting their presidential candidates. This rule gave the South a century-long veto over presidential nominees from 1831 to 1932. It was race that led to two separate Democratic nominating conventions in 1860 and it was race that resulted in 103 ballots at the 1924 convention.

In the postwar years, it was the racial divide which led not only to many southern delegates storming out of the 1948 Democratic Convention to create the Dixiecrat presidential candidacy of Governor Thurmond, but also the "loyalty oath" battle at the 1952 convention; the "independent elector" movement in the 1960 election for Virginia Senator Harry Flood Byrd; and the presidential candidacies of Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1964, 1968, and 1972. The "Willie Horton" campaign against Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in the 1988 election was a dramatic example of how race politics play havoc with Democratic presidential fortunes.

But the House remained relatively unaffected and the Democrats were able to hold the House for 60 out of 64 years between 1931 and 1994. Democratic leaders in the House sought to finesse, control, and contain racial politics, the most vehement and volatile of the issues with which the party has had to contend in its lengthy existence. The most effective way to do this was to bring into the leadership members who could accommodate this divisiveness. These members had districts that permitted them flexibility to have friends on both sides of the issue. Members from Texas and Massachusetts—Austin and Boston—met the requirement. These leaders could direct the U.S. House of Representatives to contain the race question but not necessarily to address it.

The personal dimension: Poverty and probity

On a personal level, John McCormack was a mainstay "in the room" because he was reliable. A lifelong teetotaler, he always had his wits about him; he remembered everything. A Boston Irishman, McCormack could keep secrets, knowing full well that the most disdained person among the Irish was an informant. A devout Roman Catholic, he valued loyalty above all other virtues. He needed no press attention to

feel good about himself. His solid marriage of 51 years provided him with all of the emotional sustenance that he needed. His background of poverty led him to value minor financial comforts and the steadiness of a job that lasted 42 years. His modesty, frugality, and integrity made McCormack the "moral compass" of the House of Representatives.

Furthermore, John McCormack was "a poor boy who had made good." The "poor boy" motif is played out again and again among the Austin-Boston Speakers. It was true of Sam Rayburn, whose farmer father uprooted the family from the dwindling fields of Roane County in the mountains of east Tennessee to the more productive ones of northeast Texas; of Joe Martin, whose blacksmith father made too little money to educate his oldest son; of Carl Albert, whose coal miner father had located in a community only large enough to support a one-room schoolhouse; of Tip O'Neill, who grew up the motherless son of a Boston Irish bricklayer; and of Jim Wright, whose itinerant father roamed through the Southwest as a traveling salesman. The shared hardships of their early lives united these men and sensitized them to the deprivations that continued in America and the role that the federal government could play in alleviating them.

But McCormack's life history was different. His early hardships were genuine, but the story of his life was altered to fit the realities of gaining public office in Boston, a city hopelessly fractured by ethnic and religious conflicts. McCormack had often told people of his early life, of a poor Irish-born immigrant father who died young, leaving 13-year-old John, the oldest son, to care for his Irish-born mother and two younger siblings.[54]

It was a powerful story and had been recounted often. The greatest of the early-twentieth-century Boston Irish politicians—James Michael Curley, the presumed hero of the classic novel *The Last Hurrah*, and both of President John F. Kennedy's grandfathers, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and Patrick "P.J." Kennedy—had stories identical to this. The power of this tale of Irish fathers, widowed mothers, and younger siblings had elevated them to positions of high station within Irish Boston. Once John McCormack had convinced the gatekeepers that he was "one of them," he ascended quickly through the ranks of the Boston Irish, and once elevated to the U.S. House of Representatives he was able to play a large and lasting role in American political life.

An Early Alliance: While it was Sam Rayburn of Texas and John McCormack of Boston who were the original "Austin-Boston Connection," both men were linked by their respective mentors. Rayburn's was Speaker John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner of Uvalde, Texas, while McCormack's was James Michael Curley, Boston's four-time mayor. Garner and Rayburn had both been mentored by fellow Texan Joe Bailey, one-time House Minority Leader. Jack Garner and Jim Curley got to know one another when they served together on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 1911–13. Twenty years later, in July 1932, pro-FDR Bostonians Jim Curley and Joe Kennedy lobbied William Randolph Hearst to shift California's delegates to FDR with Cactus Jack named as vice president. Curley delivered a resounding seconding speech for Garner. Just months before, in December 1931, John McCormack in only his third year was elected to the House Ways and Means Committee with support from Speaker Garner

and all of the Texans. "It was a record," recounted McCormack as he remembered his early ascension to this most formidable seat of power.[55] The first step had been taken.

In 1940 Sam Rayburn would be elected as Speaker and John McCormack would be elected as Majority Leader. They would take the reins of the House Democrats and never face a challenging vote in the 21 years that they served together as the party's top two leaders. And their respective protégés—Rayburn's Carl Albert of Oklahoma and Jim Wright of Texas along with McCormack's protégé Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr.—would extend the reach of the "Austin-Boston Connection" into June 1989 and Speaker Jim Wright's resignation from the House.

The Austin-Boston Speakers kept the Democratic majority in the House together for a half-century. They did this by defining race politics in a way that limited the divisiveness of the issue as long as possible through containment and deflection.

Regional divisions could be handled through taxation and appropriations policies that would redistribute the substantial post–New Deal federal tax revenues from the wealthy industrial states of the Northeast and Midwest to the relatively benighted ones of the South and Southwest. Defense expenditures were the best vehicle for this interregional transfer of funds because national security was the one issue that enjoyed a wide consensus of popular support. The members of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, the spending Appropriations Committee, and the Armed Services Committee all knew their respective roles in the reallocation of these revenues to those places most in need of financial uplift. The South had benefited most from the World War II build-up and its military bases were the major beneficiaries of defense appropriations. Keeping Democrats in power protected the seniority of the southern Representatives and the committee chairmanships they held.

In the northern urban areas, the House redistributed federal revenues to alleviate the economic hardships of families. The key to the success of these programs was to make them income-targeted and not race-targeted. The fact that minority families were disproportionately poor made them disproportionately the beneficiaries of federal welfare policy. Many of these families endured financial hardships similar to those of the "poor boy" Austin-Boston Speakers, who used their legislative powers to insure that future generations would not have to undergo the financial deprivations that they had overcome.

Religious divisions, which disrupted national presidential politics in the Al Smith candidacy of 1928, were handled within the House. No religious tests were imposed upon those Democrats who would gain power within the chamber, either at the elected level of floor leadership as in the case of Roman Catholics like Boston's McCormack and Tip O'Neill and New Orleans's Hale Boggs or in the elevation of committee chairs with Jewish Representatives like New York City's Sol Bloom of the Foreign Affairs Committee and Emanuel Celler of the Judiciary Committee, and Chicago's Adolph Sabath on the Rules Committee. By protecting the seniority system, the House Democratic leadership was able to reward those members whose ethnically homogeneous enclaves had made them immune enough to defeat to accumulate the seniority needed for a committee chairmanship.

For these House leaders, their ascents through the social structure were vivid affirmations of the "American Dream." The posts they held were hard-won, and they had come much too far to risk these posts for abstract principles. They contained disruptive issues. Containing issues may not have always been good social policy or ideologically consistent, but it guaranteed institutional survival in the House. A major architect of this strategy was John McCormack.

After McCormack left the House in 1971, the Austin-Boston speakership continued for another 18 years with his friends and protégés Carl Albert, Tip O'Neill, and Jim Wright following him to the Speaker's chair. The forced departure of Fort Worth's Jim Wright in 1989 due to the ethics onslaught of Georgia Republican Newt Gingrich ended the Austin-Boston speakership.[56]

The vacuum left by its collapse was filled by the most agenda-driven of the House's various legislative groupings—the Congressional Black Caucus. Following Wright's departure, it was they who got Philadelphia's William Gray elected as majority whip, the first black in the top ranks of House leadership. It was the Congressional Black Caucus that also pushed President George H. W. Bush's Justice Department to create "majority-minority" districts that would more than double minority representation in the 1992 House elections but would "bleach" adjacent congressional districts.[57]

The racial "bleaching" of these districts placed the white southern Democratic moderates representing them at risk. Two years later, in 1994, more than twenty southern Democrats fell before the young white conservative zealots recruited by Newt Gingrich, the man who had ended the career of Jim Wright. It was the defeats of the southern Democratic moderates that gave Newt Gingrich the seats he needed to install himself as Speaker of the House.[58] Perhaps it was fitting that the man who would end the Austin-Boston speakership would be the beneficiary of its demise.

The end of the Austin-Boston speakership unleashed racial forces which led to the loss of Democratic control of the House. This would have dismayed John McCormack but would not have surprised him. The public speakership, fashioned in large part by his protégé Tip O'Neill, would have also dismayed him.[59] Endless rounds of press conferences, C-SPAN coverage, Sunday morning talk show interviews, and all the other aspects of the "public speakership" would have sent him scurrying from office. McCormack's public life was a very private one. It was not the only irony of his 42-year congressional career, but the most obvious one.

No one in national public life disliked the limelight more than John McCormack. No political figure of his era was more resistant than he about a biography. But times have changed. Today's speakership of the House is on daily public display, with six years of a Republican House of Representatives committed to dismantling much of the economic legislation passed to lighten the burdens of America's underprivileged citizens. The time has arrived for an assessment of John McCormack, one of the congressional architects of both the New Deal and the Great Society, and the last private Speaker of the House. In the process we will learn more about how the U.S. House of Representatives operated and how a small group of long-serving congressional leaders managed the nation's business while containing the divisive politics of race, region, and religion.

Notes

1 Presidential Succession Act of 1947, approved July 18, 1947 (Public law 80-199; 61 Statutes 380-381). Public Law (P.L.) refers to the numeric order of legislation passed within a Congress.

2 Birch Bayh, *One Heartbeat Away: Presidential Disability and Succession* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968).

3 The most critical accounts of the McCormack speakership are contained in two books by U.S. Representative Richard Bolling (Dem-Mo.): *House Out of Order* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965); and *Power in the House: A History of the Leadership of the House of Representatives* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 230–38. Bolling was a protégé of Sam Rayburn, who anticipated that he would follow Rayburn as Speaker. Bolling contended that McCormack as Speaker had surrendered power to the conservative committee chairs.

4 Author's telephonic interview with Dr. Martin Sweig, Winthrop, MA, June 1998.

5 The only work to deal with the five Democratic Austin-Boston Speakers is Anthony Champagne, Douglas B. Harris, James W. Riddlesperger, Jr., and Garrison Nelson, *The Austin-Boston Connection: Five Decades of House Democratic Leadership* (College Station: Texas A+M University Press, 2009). While Joe Martin, the lone Republican Speaker, is excluded, two Texas Democratic mentors are included: House Minority Leader Joseph W. Bailey and Speaker John Nance Garner.

6 The best biographies and memoirs on Sam Rayburn include C. Dwight Dorough, *Mr. Sam* (New York: Random House, 1962); Booth Mooney, *Roosevelt and Rayburn: A Political Partnership* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1971); Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975); two books by Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984) and *Sam Rayburn: A Bio-bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); H. G. Dulaney and Edward H. Phillips, eds., "*Speak, Mister Speaker*" (Bonham, TX: Sam Rayburn Foundation, 1978); and D. B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1987).

7 Books and memoirs on Jim Wright include John Barry, *The Ambition and the Power: The Fall of Jim Wright* (New York: Viking, 1989); Wright's memoirs, *Worth It All: My War for Peace* (New York: Brasseys, 1993) and *Balance of Power: Presidents and Congress from the Era of McCarthy to the Age of Gingrich* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996); and collections of his writings, *Reflections of a Public Man* (Fort Worth, TX: Allied, 1984); as well as the compilation by James W. Riddlesperger, Jr., Anthony Champagne, and Dan Williams, eds., *The Wright Stuff: Reflections on People and Politics* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2013).

8 Books and memoirs on Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr. include Paul Clancy and Shirley Elder, *Tip: A Biography of Thomas P. O'Neill, Speaker of the House* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); his best-selling memoir with William Novak, *Man of the House: The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O'Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987). The best account is John Aloysius Farrell, *Tip O'Neill and the Democratic Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001). Chris Matthews, who served on O'Neill's staff, has just published a wonderful joint biography of President Reagan and Speaker O'Neill entitled, *Tip and the Gipper: When Politics Worked* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

9 On Joe Martin, see his autobiography as told to Robert J. Donovan, *My First Fifty Years in Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960); and the James J. Kenneally's biography,

A Compassionate Conservative: A Political Biography of Joseph W. Martin, Jr., Member of the U.S. House of Representatives (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003).

10 Carl Albert's autobiography with Danney Goble, *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

11 Author's telephonic interview with the Hon. John W. McCormack, April 1977.

12 Letter from John W. McCormack to H. G. Dulaney, quoted in Champagne et al., *The Austin-Boston Connection*, p. 130.

13 "Presidential Victories on Votes in Congress, 1953–2007," in Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, eds., *Vital Statistics on Congress, 2008* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, CQ Press, 2008), pp. 144–45, and updated with *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*.

14 Robert D. Novak, *The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years of Reporting in Washington* (New York: Crown Forum, 2007), p. 301.

15 Jeffrey R. Biggs and Thomas S. Foley, *Honor in the House: Speaker Tom Foley* (Pullman: Washington State University, 1999), pp. 69–70.

16 Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Times to Remember* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), p. 428.

17 Herbert S. Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York: The Dial Press, 1983), p. 205. Parmet lists the interview with the unnamed historian as "Confidential source" (p. 378, n. 14).

18 Lester Gordon, oral history interviews for Boston University with John McCormack, "Eisenhower Years, 1952–1960," Tape 15, June 1, 1973.

19 A typical article about John McCormack in the Horatio Alger genre is Richard W. O'Connor, "From Andrew Square to the Speaker's Chair," *Yankee*, XL (April 1976), pp. 90–95 and 132–34. McCormack loved the Horatio Alger stories and his onetime residence at 470 Dorchester Street met Alger Street at the curb, which was named for Boston's own Horatio Alger. John's nickname in South Boston was "Little Dick" because of his affinity for the Burt L. Standish dime novels about Frank and Dick Merriwell, the star baseball-playing brothers at Yale.

20 Author's interview with U.S. House Speaker John W. McCormack, Washington, DC, September 1968.

21 Among the relevant accounts are Sander Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974); Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); and Earl Latham, *The Communist Conspiracy in Washington from the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

22 See "'Crook': A Soviet Agent in Congress," in Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, eds., *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 1999), chapter 7.

23 Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, p. 212.

24 The Alien Registration Act (Smith Act) was approved on June 28, 1940 (Public Law 76-670; 54 Statutes 670-76). McCormack's role was described in the author's interview with Dr. Martin Sweig, May 1997.

25 Author's telephonic interview with the Hon. John W. McCormack, Boston, MA, April 1977.

26 McCormack's role in deflecting Irish-American opposition to legislation aiding Britain may be found in T. Ryle Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the USA: 1939–1947* (Dublin: Gill

and Macmillan, 1977), p. 39. See also Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., later to become secretary of state, who describes McCormack's role in his account, *Lend-Lease: Weapon for Victory* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), on pp. 68 and 70. McCormack's Irish-American connection is made in Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans, and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), pp. 216–17.

27 McCormack resolutions: Declaration of a State of War with Japan was approved December 8, 1941 (Public Law 77-328; 55 *Statutes* 795). Roll call vote 130, *Congressional Record*, 77th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 9536–37. Declaration of a State of War with Germany was approved December 11, 1941 (Public Law 77-331; 55 *Statutes* 796); and Declaration of a State of War with Italy was approved December 11, 1941 (Public Law 77-332; 55 *Statutes* 797). Roll call votes 131 and 132, *Congressional Record*, 77th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 9665–67.

28 See Joe Martin's book, *My First Fifty Years in Politics*, pp. 100–101; and Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), p. 614.

29 Robert H. Ferrell, *Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994). McCormack is not mentioned in Ferrell's book, even though he chaired the Resolutions Committee that wrote the platform. See "McCormack Asks Collaboration," *NYT* (July 10, 1944), p. 16; James A. Hagerty, "Wallace Backers in Chicago Gloomy . . . Brief Platform Sought—McCormack and Mrs. Norton Put It at 500 to 1,000 Words—Foreign Policy Stressed," *NYT* (July 15, 1944), p. 26; and "Foreign-Policy Day Set by Democrats—McCormack Says the Platform Makers Will Devote All of Wednesday to This Issue," *NYT* (July 17, 1944), p. 8.

30 Robert Donovan's version of that fateful afternoon has only Lewis Deschler, the House parliamentarian, and James M. Barnes, a former Illinois congressman and White House legislative liaison, in the room with Truman and Rayburn. Others were expected at the close of House business. See Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 3–5. See also President Truman's own recollection in Volume I of his memoirs, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), p. 4; and David M. McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 4 and 7 for the swearing-in.

31 James Michael Curley noted John Kennedy as "the glaring exception," in his autobiography, *I'd Do It Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), pp. 333–34. Jack Beatty contends that the decision not to sign the petition was JFK's own and it countered his father's wishes. JFK wished to avenge Curley's attacks on his namesake and his mother's father, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley, 1884–1958* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 480. President Truman gave John McCormack the credit for the Curley pardon. "I did it for you, John," was the president's statement (p. 481).

32 The episode is recounted in Christopher Manning's valuable biography, *William L. Dawson and the Limits of Black Electoral Leadership* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2009), p. 128. Associated Press, "McCormack Aids Dawson: Steps Aside to Open Committee Chairmanship to Negro," *NYT* (January 1, 1949), p. 24.

33 On John McCormack's electoral appeal to the voters of heavily Jewish Ward 14 (Mattapan), see Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The Political Behavior of American Jews* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956), p. 138n.

34 Joe Kennedy's anti-Semitism was long suspected. See "The Jewish Question," in Ronald Kessler's *The Sins of the Father: Joseph p. Kennedy and the Dynasty He Founded* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), pp. 161–76. It is also noted in the highly critical book by Nigel Hamilton, *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 108, 247, 512, and 669. John McCormack's assistance to John Kennedy with Jewish voters is recounted in his interview with T. Harrison Baker of the University of Texas Oral History Project, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, September 23, 1968, pp. 21–22.

35 "1956 Primaries," in *Congressional Quarterly*, *Presidential Elections, 1789–1992* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1995), p. 172. Only write-ins were recorded in the April 24, 1956, Massachusetts primary. McCormack captured 26,128 votes (47.9%) to Adlai Stevenson's 19,024 (34.9%). John Kennedy finished in fifth place with 949 votes behind McCormack, Stevenson, Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver (4,547 votes), and Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1,859 votes).

36 On McCormack's presumed anti-Kennedy efforts at the 1956 Democratic Convention, see "National Affairs: The Wide Open Winner," *TIME* (August 27, 1956).

37 The House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration was created on March 5, 1958, by H.Res. 496 of the 85th Congress. The committee was created that day with House Majority Leader John W. McCormack named as chair.

38 Given the fact that this selection led to two important presidencies, this decision has been analyzed countless times. The narrow success of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket has led many to take credit for putting it together. Even though John McCormack was named by John Kennedy to be his convention floor manager, he is most often left out of accounts that focus on decision-making within the Kennedy camp. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1965), pp. 50–57; Jules Witcover, *Crapshoot: Rolling the Dice on the Vice Presidency* (New York: Crown, 1992), pp. 140–63; and Jeff Shesol, "The Affront," in *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 41–60. John McCormack's role, if acknowledged, was presumably to convince his good friend Sam Rayburn, Johnson's floor manager, that John Kennedy was offering the vice presidency to Lyndon Johnson in good faith and not as an empty gesture with the assumption that the offer would be rejected. See John McCormack's interview with T. Harrison Baker of the University of Texas Oral History Project, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, September 23, 1968, pp. 13–17. See also Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising; Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 574–82.

39 See John McCormack's interview with T. Harrison Baker of the University of Texas Oral History Project, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, September 23, 1968, pp. 24–25.

40 The fullest account of this conflict appears in Murray B. Levin, *Kennedy Campaigning: The System and the Style as Practiced by Senator Edward Kennedy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). The Teddy-Eddie debates and their aftermath are covered in chapter 4, pp. 181–232.

41 Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President, 1964* (New York: Atheneum, 1965) covered the convention in chapter 9, "Lyndon Johnson's Convention," pp. 243–93.

42 See *Congressional Quarterly*, "Congress, 1965—the Year in Review: Johnson Leadership, Large Majorities Win Legislative Grand Slam for Democrats," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1964*, XXI (Washington, DC, 1965), pp. 65–79. And in "Congress Backs Johnson on 93% of Roll Call Votes," pp. 1099–1110. The success rate for Johnson in the House itself was 94% (105 successes on 112 votes).

43 A day-by-day recounting of the Powell case may be found in U.S. Representative Andy Jacobs Jr.'s (Dem-Ind.) book *The Powell Affair: Freedom Minus One* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973). Secondary accounts of this event may be found in p. Allan Dionisopoulos, *Rebellion, Racism and Representation* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp. 1–18; and Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), pp. 445–78.

44 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1969*, XXV (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), p. 25.

45 Sumners's opposition may be found in the daily recounting of the battle in Joseph Alsop and Turner Catledge's *The 168 Days* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1938), p. 67. See also the analysis of Sumners's crucial role in Anthony Champagne, "Hatton Sumners and the 1937 Court-Packing Plan," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 26 (Spring 1988), pp. 46–49.

46 James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933–1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967).

47 Polly Davis, "Court Reform and Alben W. Barkley's Election as Majority Leader," *Southern Quarterly*, XV (1976), pp. 15–31.

48 This argument gets a fuller treatment in Garrison Nelson, "Congressional Race Politics and the End of the Austin-Boston Connection," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association in Portland, Maine, April 1990.

49 Of the 12 largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) in the country, Boston ranked 12th in the 1960 Census and 11th in the 1970 Census with regard to the proportion of blacks in the SMSA's "core city." In 1960, Boston's 9.1% proportion of blacks fell 15.5 points below the 24.6 median for these 12 urban places. In 1970, Boston's 16.3 was 16.9 points below that year's median for black populations in the core cities of the 12 largest SMSAs. Figures are recomputed from data presented in the 1977 edition of the Statistical Abstract of the U.S. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1977), pp. 22–24.

50 Author's telephonic interview with Dr. Martin Sweig, Winchester, MA, May 1997.

51 Author's telephonic interview with the Hon. John W. McCormack, Boston, April 1977.

52 Rayburn's opposition to Colmer is stated in a letter to Jere Cooper (Dem-Tenn.), the second-ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, November 22, 1948, in the Rayburn Papers, Rayburn Library, 1948 files, Miscellaneous A-2, July–December, as cited in James A. Robinson, *The House Rules Committee* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), pp. 104–105.

53 A well-written reminder of the Democratic Party's unfortunate racist legacy is recounted in Bruce Bartlett's *Wrong on Race: The Democratic Party's Buried Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). A solid overview of the role played by race politics in presidential decision-making over the course of American history may be found in Kenneth O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton* (New York: The Free Press, 1995). See also Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991).

54 The biographical accounts of John McCormack's early life all contain this version. See: Donald R. Kennon, ed., "John William McCormack," in *The Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives: A Bibliography, 1789–1984* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 266; Charles Moritz, ed., "John W. McCormack," in *Current Biography, 1962* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1963), pp. 275–77; Richard H. Gentile, "John William McCormack," in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *DAB, Supplement Ten, 1975–1980* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), pp. 483–87. *Mea culpa*. I accepted the story in my profile of John McCormack in Donald C. Bacon, Roger H. Davidson, and Morton H. Keller, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, III (New York; Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 1328–30.

55 Author's interview with the Hon. John W. McCormack in the Speaker's Office, Washington, DC, September 1968.

56 Needless to say the Wright and Gingrich accounts of this event differ. For Wright's version, see his *Balance of Power*, pp. 474 and 484–85. For Gingrich's version of the removal of Wright, see Newt Gingrich, *Lessons Learned the Hard Way: A Personal Report* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 88 and 92–94.

57 Only a few contemporaneous accounts described the racial "bleaching" in southern congressional districts for the 1994 victory. See Richard E. Cohen, "Campaigning for Congress: The Echo of 1994," in Larry Sabato, ed., *Towards the Millennium: The Elections of 1996* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), pp. 174–77. One early account anticipated the potential problem for the Democrats; see the Occasional Paper prepared for the McCormack Institute of Public Affairs by Maurice T. Cunningham and Edmund Beard, *The Re-segregation of America: The Racial Politics of Legislative Redistricting* (Boston: University of Massachusetts-Boston, 1993). The unintended consequences are described in David Canon's prize-winning *Race, Redistricting, and Representation: The Unintended Consequences of Black Majority Districts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and that it may have been intended by the G.H.W. Bush Justice Department in Maurice T. Cunningham's *Maximization, Whatever the Cost: Race, Redistricting and the Department of Justice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

58 Accounts of the 1994 congressional election include James A. Finefrock, "The Republican Tsunami," *San Francisco Examiner* (December 9, 1994), p. A-11. Among the more evocative descriptions were "Stampede!," the cover story for *TIME*, CXLIV (November 21, 1994), pp. 46–49ff; J. Weisberg's "After the Deluge," *New York*, XXVII (November 14, 1994), pp. 28ff.; Meg Greenfield's "After the Big One," *Newsweek*, CXXIV (November 21, 1994), p. 108; and R. Lacayo's "After the Revolution," *TIME*, CLXIV (November 28, 1994), pp. 28–33.

59 Douglas B. Harris, "The Rise of the Public Speakership," *Political Science Quarterly*, CXIII (Summer 1998), pp. 193–212.

2

Irish Emigration and the Cauldron of Yankee Boston

Seldom does the misery of others provide as much joy as did the plight of the Irish for the British. As the Great Famine of the 1840s ravaged the Irish countryside and depopulated Ireland of its citizenry through death, disease, and departure, the *London Times* gleefully announced[1]:

> They are going! They are going! The Irish are going with a vengeance. Soon a Celt . . . will be as rare in Ireland as a Red Indian on the shore of Manhattan. Law has ridden through Ireland; it has been taught with bayonets, and interpreted with ruin. Townships leveled with the ground, straggling columns of exiles, workhouses multiplied, and still crowded, express the determination of the legislature to rescue Ireland from its slovenly old barbarism, and to plant there the institutions of this more civilised land.

The goal of British policy was to rid the Irish countryside of its impoverished small farmers with their large families—the "cotters"—and to claim their lands for more lucrative agricultural pursuits.

No one of Irish descent in Boston has been able to escape the oft-told tale of how the sad and destitute immigrants left their once beloved Ireland in the 1840s to escape its squalor, poverty, and misery, seeking refuge in North America, three thousand miles across the frigid Atlantic. A nation of eight million was almost halved by the potato blight that led to the deaths of more than 1 million Irishmen and the diaspora of well more than 1 million others who fled the island during that horrendous half-decade from 1845 to 1850. No country has ever been as depopulated by out-migration as Ireland. Only the German immigrants outnumbered the Irish and there were far more Germans remaining in Europe than arriving in America.

Often weakened and enfeebled by disease, most notably cholera, many others died shipboard as they contracted "boat fever"—or typhus—and were tossed overboard to awaiting sharks or sent back on ships after American and Canadian immigration officials deemed them unworthy of landing safely in North America. That the worst of these boats, where as many as 30% of the immigrants would not survive, came to be known as "coffin ships" is no surprise.[2] The death rate among Irish immigrants to North America was lower among immigrants to the United States because the

American immigration officials turned back ships filled with sickly Irishmen. Many of these ships would sail north to Canada rather than return across the Atlantic with passengers who had already paid their transit fees. The Irish émigrés to Canada were worse off because they were poorer. Twenty percent of them died either en route or shortly after landing.

In the United States, the East Coast ports of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston all became destinations for the Irish and receptions differed. New York City with its preexisting multiple ethnic and religious communities had little problem accepting the Irish. There was no dominant ethnic group to displace with Englishmen, Scots, Walloons, Danes, Norwegians, and Germans all finding homes in the Dutch-founded province of New Netherland, its major encampment in the city then known as New Amsterdam.[3] As early as 1644, 20 years before it was named New York, it was contended that 18 different languages were represented in the population of Manhattan and its environs. The Irish were not among the city's early settlers, but that would change two centuries later as the Great Famine ravaged the Irish countryside. Journalist Edward E. Hale reported that "the total arrivals in New York from all countries, are generally about three fourths of the arrivals in our ports," and it is estimated that between 1847 and 1860, more than one million Irishmen entered the United States through the Port of New York.

Philadelphia's mantra as "the city of brotherly love" and Pennsylvania's state motto of "Virtue, Liberty, and Independence" produced a culture of tolerance that made these states hospitable for the newer immigrants.[4] Philadelphia's political and economic elite was predominantly Quaker, and having faced discrimination of their own from the Puritans to the north and the Anglicans to the south of them, they were more accepting of the later Irish Catholic newcomers.

Most of the early pre-Famine Irish immigrants to Philadelphia were Scots-Irish Protestants, largely Presbyterians, from the Ulster Plantation in the north of Ireland. Many had come from Scottish families that had been previously relocated to Ireland's northeastern province as a consequence of the euphemistically labeled "Highland Clearances."[5] Other Scottish immigrants to North America had already been settled in the fertile lands of the Canadian Maritimes, most notably Nova Scotia or "New Scotland," displacing the French Acadians who had settled in those places earlier.

Scots-Irish who came to the American colonies moved through Pennsylvania westward into the Alleghenies and down the spine of the Appalachian chain.[6] They settled in the mountains of the western Carolinas, creating enclaves in what would become the states of Kentucky and Tennessee after the Revolution. It was the congressional descendants of these settlers with whom John McCormack would find his closest friends and most like-minded allies.

Baltimore, which had been founded by the English Catholic Calvert family, was the initial seat of Roman Catholicism in the United States; so Irish Catholics arriving in their port was not disquieting.[7] It was not a major destination of the Famine Irish, with Hale reporting that only 6,772 émigrés landed in Baltimore of the 270,570 recorded as having arrived in American ports in 1850.[8]

Boston transformed

Boston was different. It was to be the chosen destination of the righteous that would reform and purify the Church of England that had been corrupted by the Stuarts.[9] They were "Puritans." Boston was not their initial landing place but other locations were less appealing—Salem with its rocky harbor, Marblehead with its narrow one, and Lynn with its deep tides and long landfall. And the hill upon which their settlement would beam righteousness across the Atlantic to the benighted souls of Europe would be known as Beacon Hill—to transmit rectitude and godliness in this New England, this better England, this uncorrupted England.[10]

It was an immodest goal, but these were an immodest people. The Puritans were far wealthier, better educated, and much more politically powerful than the impoverished and bedraggled settlers who arrived in Plymouth a decade earlier. Led by Governor John Winthrop, the Puritans of Boston had begun their "errand into the wilderness" to accomplish great things.[11] Boston was to be a "City upon a Hill" that the Gospel of Matthew contends is one that "cannot be hid," while the eyes of the world would watch this city and learn from it.

Although Boston was the largest English settlement for most of the seventeenth century, it was bypassed by Philadelphia and New York in the eighteenth century—cities with better climates and more rivers for commerce. Most importantly, New York and Philadelphia were far more welcoming of the newer immigrants.[12] With the Massachusetts state motto, "By the Sword She Seeks Peace Under Liberty," they were forewarned. This was the place of the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, the battles of Lexington, Concord where the "shot heard around the world" was fired, and Bunker Hill. It was the colonial capital that most violently resisted English authority.

Consequently, Boston did not have to confront other European immigrants who might have challenged their white English Congregationalist hegemony. Certainly not the Scots-Irish whose Presbyterianism made them unwelcome in Massachusetts Bay, nor did the Bostonians have to deal with the German and Scandinavian Lutherans who wanted land and moved west to the wide fertile fields of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Unlike the Germans and Scandinavians, the agricultural skills of the Irish were not well regarded. The regular potato harvest cycle of good years and bad years had finally taken their toll as an unbroken succession of bad years in the 1840s and a quasi-permanent potato blight led many of them to lose confidence in the agricultural way of life. When they came to North America, most chose urban life.

Because the Irish were predominantly English speakers, they were able to intermingle with the predominantly English-speaking citizens of the United States. Their brogues and accents may have set them apart as did the illiteracy imposed upon them by the English landholders back in Ireland. But it was the deep-seated commitment of the immigrant Irish to Roman Catholicism with its conservative Jansenist orientation which made them appear most mysterious and threatening to Protestant America.

In many ways, Boston was the least diverse of the large American cities on the eve of the Irish immigration.[13] It was an English-speaking Protestant city and its

Protestants were primarily Congregationalist or Unitarians, that unique Boston quasi-heresy. Other denominations including the Episcopalians and Methodists existed in the city, but Boston of the 1840s was remarkably racially, religiously, and linguistically homogenous.

The pre–Civil War years of Yankee Boston were remarkable. Its industry and commerce flourished and the city's literary output staggered belief. Its authors and poets, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry David Thoreau, and the senior Oliver Wendell Holmes, had achieved widespread fame and approbation throughout the English-speaking world.[14] Boston, the "City on a Hill," had become "the Athens of America" and was worth its attention.[15] These Protestant Yankees were clearly superior beings.

The Resistant Mindset: But who were these Irish people? Was this Puritan city now under Catholic siege? Why had these people come to this center of enlightenment? To many Bostonians, Irish barbarians had arrived at the docks and with them came destitution and disease. Newly elected Harvard-educated Mayor John Prescott Bigelow faced a major outbreak of cholera in the city. In 1849, over 5,000 people died out of a population of 130,000, approximately 4% of the city's citizens. In his 1850 inaugural address, Bigelow blamed the deaths on "palpable indiscretions in diet, or intemperance" as the wave of Irish immigrants and "its throng of disabled mariners, destitute strangers, and reckless and dissolute persons from every clime. [as] Foreign paupers are rapidly accumulating on our hands. . . . Numbers of helpless beings, including imbeciles in both body and mind—the aged, the blind, the paralytic, and the lunatic have been landed from immigrant vessels to become instantly, and permanently a charge upon our public charities."[16]

Even that most cherished of the Yankee intellectuals, Henry David Thoreau, who empathized with all of God's creatures, displayed remarkable callousness and condescension to his Irish neighbors on Walden Pond, the Fields. The disdain felt by Thoreau, who had often come to the spot in the woods where the Fields settled long before "the ship was built that floated this family to America," was palpable[17]: "An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field and his wife . . . with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible any where." The insensitive Thoreau described the infant child of the Fields as a "poor starveling brat" and felt that any serious discussion with one of John Field's ancestry was doomed. "But alas! The culture of an Irishman is an enterprise to be undertaken with a moral bog hoe."[18]

Apart from their growing numbers, the most troubling aspect of the Irish emigrants to Boston's Brahmins, the self-designated elite of well-educated Puritan descendants, was their devotion to the Roman Catholic Church and the slavery-supporting Democratic Party. In 1864, Thoreau's neighbor and landlord, the estimable Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote to his friend the British essayist Thomas Carlyle concerning the Democratic Party, "Take from it the wild Irish element imported in the last 25 years into this country, and led by Romish Priests, who sympathize, of course, with despotism, and you would bereave it of all its numerical strength."[19]

In spite of the seemingly insuperable odds against them, immigrants still came to Boston and its environs. This was where New England's jobs were. Both the immigrant Irish from across the ocean and the poor mountain Yankees and French Canadians from northern New England, who filled the mills and the factories, made possible the prosperity of New England that enabled the literary and well-educated Brahmins to sit comfortably in their book-lined studies and write their elegiac poems and prose for appreciative national audiences.[20]

Nineteenth-century industrialization in Boston did not grow as rapidly or penetrate the city's social and economic structure as it did elsewhere.[21] The lack of private sector employment placed greater demands upon public sector employers—the police force, the fire department, the public schools and libraries, and the sanitation and sewer systems. These were the jobs that could be filled by political intervention providing the currency of electoral campaigns. Consequently, the arrival of waves of Irish immigrants in Boston was greeted with a great deal of local apprehension. The leaders of the city saw little to be gained by this massive influx of cheap labor whose bumptious ways and relative illiteracy would disrupt Boston's self-styled role as "the Athens of America."[22]

Furthermore, the city and its neighboring environs already had a pool of skilled and semiskilled artisans for its private workforce and a number of marginally skilled souls for its public workforce—the "swamp Yankees." The designation derived from their settlements along the marshy regions north and south of the city. Nothing of agricultural value could be grown on them and using their water-soaked straw and peat to heat one's home required more energy than it was worth. Primarily small artisans and early factory workers, the swamp Yankees added troops to the Brahmin aristocracy and its resistance to the Irish Catholic immigrant invasion. The swamp Yankees were both tough and threatened. Violence often broke out between them and the newly arrived Irish who sought the same jobs near the bottom of the economic ladder.

Race Politics: Of all the nation's major cities, Boston had the fewest blacks and the most active antislavery societies. These antislavery societies were led by the city's array of intellectuals, Protestant clerics, and the Brahmin aristocracy.[23] With prominent abolitionist activists like William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator*; Theodore Parker, the city's leading Unitarian minister; and the powerful orator Wendell Phillips, Boston led the antislavery movement in the North. It was in Boston that the escaped slave Frederick Douglass would first make his mark with the publication in 1845 of his stirring autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself*.[24]

Seven years later in 1852, American presidential politics took a dramatic turn as the Whig Party of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, who would both die that year, nominated its last presidential candidate General Winfield Scott, who lost badly to Democratic ex-Senator Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. Pierce was one of the proslavery northerners labeled as "doughfaces" by the abolitionist press. Pierce's classmates at Maine's Bowdoin College included Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote his campaign biography, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Pierce married Jane Means Appleton, the daughter of Bowdoin's president. But it was another Bowdoin personage

who truly altered the national landscape: Harriet Beecher Stowe, the wife of a Bowdoin professor, whose novel, entitled simply *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly*, was published by Boston publisher John P. Jewett & Co. It became the best-selling American novel of the nineteenth century. While President Abraham Lincoln's supposed greeting to Mrs. Stowe, "So this is the little lady who started this great war," is generally regarded as apocryphal, the quotation's continued existence is proof of the book's powerful impact in mobilizing the Northern public toward the antislavery cause.[25]

New England's antislavery crusade in Congress was led by former President John Quincy Adams (Whig-Mass.). During his time in the U.S. House, Adams battled against the proslavery "gag rule" that prevented abolitionist petitions from reaching the House floor. For ten of his seventeen illustrious years in the U.S. House, Adams's 12th Massachusetts District (1833–43) contained the town of Dorchester that would be the heart of John McCormack's 12th Massachusetts District 90 years later.[26] And in 1856, U.S. Senator Charles Sumner (Rep-Mass.) was almost fatally caned on the Senate floor by U.S. Representative Preston Brooks (Dem-SC) for his antislavery speeches,[27] further signaling to the nation the powerful antipathy of Boston's leading citizens toward that "peculiar institution" of slavery. The abolitionist descendants of Pilgrims and Puritans were also very well aware that in the rival southern colony of Virginia, African slaves were imported to the English settlements in 1619, a year before the *Mayflower* landed in Plymouth.[28] Chained slaves in Virginia predated religious liberty in Massachusetts.

However, many of the Bostonians who led the antislavery societies were among those who most resisted the growing Irish presence. The irony is that two of the five lives lost in the nation-defining Boston Massacre of 1770 were those of the African-American Crispus Attucks and the young Irish immigrant Patrick Carr. That irony was ignored in their assessment of the Irish Catholic threat to the city.[29] There was no community of compassion here. For the upscale antislavery leaders, ridding the nation of its "original sin" of slavery was a daunting enough task. To them, the prospect of feeding, housing, employing, and policing the Irish victims of Europe's last Great Famine seemed an unwanted and unnecessary burden.[30]

It is important to remember that the Irish were the only one of the nation's newer ethnic groups whose majority came to North America when slavery was "the law of the land" in the United States. As a result, Irish Catholics were socialized into a legal system that considered blacks to be subhuman and not entitled to any of the privileges of citizenship.[31] It was Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney, a Maryland-born Catholic, who wrote in the infamous 1857 case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that slaves were property and as such had no standing to sue in the nation's federal courts. It was patriotic of the Irish to defend proslavery legislation emanating from the U.S. Congress. At last, the Irish had arrived in a place where someone other than them was at the bottom of the economic and social heap. How comforting this fact may have been to these bedraggled immigrants is debatable, but it was certainly well known.

When the Boston Irish gazed upon the stern and righteous faces of the Boston abolitionists with their long noses and doleful countenances, it was not New England Congregationalists and Unitarians that they saw. No, it was the harsh Anglican and Methodist faces of the British landowners and magistrates that came most readily to

memory. Protestant denominationalism and its subtle nuances were a mystery not worth exploring to most of America's Catholics. The adverse consequences for the Irish Catholics were real and common enough to transcend the denominational identity of their Protestant oppressors.

For Boston's Irish immigrants, the willingness of Boston's Brahmins and Yankees to risk arrest and imprisonment for these black fugitive slaves was a fearful portent of their own potential displacement in the economic and social hierarchy. The abolition of slavery carried with it fears of what the Irish had escaped thousands of miles away: a return to the bottom of the social ladder.

Many Irishmen cheered on the federal marshals who came to Boston to arrest the slaves and those who had harbored them.[32] Tensions deepened and resentment grew. Compassion on either side had few takers and toughness became a virtue. The resentment and resistance of Yankee Boston contributed to the defiant and confrontational attitudes of the Boston Irish that made them the toughest and most politically successful of the nation's urban ethnic "tribes."

The Dimension of Class: This was the Boston that the Famine Irish would encounter and transform. While Boston ranked 5th among the nation's cities in 1840, it returned to 3rd place in the 1850 Census, as its population grew during the decade from 93,383 to 136,881—an increase of 46.6%.[33] The population explosion caused by the arrival of thousands of Irishmen in the small and land-poor city of Boston led to ghettoized crowding of the Irish and dilapidated housing stock abandoned by Yankees who had moved into better quarters. In these and the temporary and jerry-built houses could be found the poorest immigrants, those whose diseases had escaped detection by immigration officials, or whose lack of education or knowledge only of Gaelic limited their employability. "Sean ti" is Gaelic for "old house" and their homes were "shanties" and their occupants were the disdained "shanty Irish."

The "lace curtain Irish" were those who aspired to a better life. They had lace curtains on their windows, lace doilies on their furniture, and fruit in their homes when no one was ill. While the shanty Irish saw America as a place to survive, the lace curtain Irish saw America as a place to thrive.

The political history of the Irish Catholic-Yankee Protestant competition too often takes on an ethno-religious dimension by focusing on the wealthy Boston Brahmin and impoverished Irish Catholic conflict.[34] This was the approach favored by Mayor James Michael Curley and William Henry Cardinal O'Connell, two sworn enemies: it tends to fuse social class origins with religion and ethnic origin downplaying the intra-class tensions that existed within each group. Not only does it understate the intra-Irish social class clash between the "shanty Irish" and the "lace curtain Irish," it also overlooks the fact that the vast majority of Boston's Protestants were poor and many lived on the city's outlying tidal marshes where little could be grown—"swamp Yankees."[35] It was the inhospitality of their land that led the swamp Yankees to become workers in the grim factory towns that surrounded the city, including Lynn, Brockton, Lawrence, and Lowell. Boston's urbane, well-educated, and wealthy Brahmins were almost as disdainful of the poorer Protestants as they were of the Irish Catholic immigrants.

Defining Boston's Brahmins: Few of the Boston Brahmins were as unsparing as Harvard's Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the physician and essayist father of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The elder Holmes is credited with popularizing the term "Brahmin" for Boston's upper-crust WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants). He airily dismissed lesser status Protestants in his 1860 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*: "The (non-Brahmin) youth is the common country boy, whose race has been bred to bodily labor. . . . You must not expect too much of any such." To Holmes and his fellow Brahmins, social class linked to educational attainment triumphed over religion and ethnicity.

The Harvard Political Factor: No discussion of Boston's Brahmins can leave out the extraordinary role of Harvard College and its impact upon the Brahmin mindset and the politics of both the state and the nation that began more than two centuries ago and continues to the present day.[36] Founded in 1636 as the nation's first college, its early preeminence in training the nation's leaders was not surprising with the eighteenth century ending with Harvard graduate John Adams as the nation's first vice president and its second president. In the 58 presidential elections that have been held since 1789, Harvard alumni have received 36 presidential and vice presidential nominations.[37] With 25 of those nominations, only its arch rival and fellow Congregationalist-founded Yale University comes close. All twelve presidential elections between 1972 and 2016 have had at least one Harvard or Yale alumnus as a major party presidential or vice presidential nominee.

No private university has dominated the public offices of any state more than Harvard has dominated Massachusetts. It is unmatched anywhere else in the United States. Of the fifty-two U.S. Senators who represented Massachusetts from 1789 to the present day, twenty-seven are alumni of Harvard College and its law school.[38] Moreover, of the nation's 114 Congresses, 97 (85.1%) have convened with at least one Harvard alumnus occupying one of Massachusetts's two Senate seats; Twenty-five Congresses have had both Massachusetts seats occupied by Harvard men. Harvard's dominance also appears in the governorship of Massachusetts where 32 of the state's 71 (45.7%) elected and acting governors from John Hancock in 1780 to its latest occupant Charles Baker have been Harvard alumni including its first five and last three.[39]

The link between Ivy League education and the State House also extended to the presiding offices of the Massachusetts Great and General Court. The years between the Civil War and World War II were clearly dominated by Ivy Leaguers: of the 22 Republican Speakers of the Massachusetts House in this era, twelve were Harvard alumni and three graduated from Dartmouth.[40] Of the 32 Senate Presidents, fifteen were Harvard alumni and Dartmouth once again provided three. Old school ties eliminated the need for organizational loyalty among the state's Republicans. Who needed a political party organization to recruit and vet candidates when you already had the Harvard Alumni Association? Shared memories of youthful life in Harvard Yard were clear indicators of the existence of social and economic safety nets in the lives of these young Ivied Yankees. They did not enter political life to ensure their economic security nor would the loss of public office cast them into personal financial

deprivation. Unlike their immigrant rivals educated at other universities and colleges, they had large and deep safety nets.

The Slow Takeover: Although its population grew in "Irishness," political power would be slow in coming because Boston had powerful, entrenched, and homogeneous elites in place that would not acquiesce in their own displacement. This made Boston unlike polyglot New York and Philadelphia and the newer cities of Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati where the Irish arrived at the start of settlement.[41] Furthermore, Boston was not only the Commonwealth's largest city, it was also the seat of its government for the state's legislature; the Great and General Court regularly convened in the glorious Charles Bulfinch–designed State House atop Beacon Hill. Those who controlled Massachusetts also controlled Boston, because the Great and General Court could and would amend the city's charter as circumstances arose.

In the 1860 Census, it was reported that 26% of Boston's residents were born in Ireland—the highest of any American city.[42] It would remain in first position for the remainder of the century with 13% Irish-born in the 1900 Census. In terms of size, Boston had settled into fifth place among the nation's fourteen largest cities, but Irish political power was slow to appear. Only one Irish mayor had been elected by the turn of the twentieth century: Hugh O'Brien, who won four one-year terms from 1884 to 1887. O'Brien's dubious reward for his electoral success was to have the Great and General Court remove his power to appoint the city's chief of police and lodge it in a governor-appointed three-member Police Commission.[43]

Boston was not the first of the nation's major cities to elect an Irish mayor or a Catholic mayor. It was the 10th of the 14 largest cities to elect a Catholic mayor and the 12th to elect an Irish Catholic one, but they clearly made up for it in a hurry.[44]

U.S. Representative Patrick Collins, a native of Fermoy in County Cork and educated at Harvard Law, was Boston's second Irish-born mayor.[45] His death in 1905 led to the short term of Daniel Whelton of the West End as the city's first native-born Irish-descended mayor. But it was John Francis "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald who would signal the arrival of Irish political hegemony. Although Fitzgerald would lose his reelection bid in 1907, it was his second victory in 1910 that marked a major sea change in Boston politics and the close of the competitive Yankee-Irish political conflict.

Over the next century, only two Protestants would capture Boston's City Hall—Brahmin Democrat Andrew J. Peters in 1917 and Yankee Republican Malcolm Nichols in 1925. In 1929, Fitzgerald's hated rival, James Michael Curley, won his third contest for mayor against Nichols and no Protestant or Republican has come close since—a span exceeding 80 years.

As twenty-first-century ethnic and racial diversity increases, Boston may no longer be the Irish Mecca that it once was, but influence in this largest of the original Puritan settlements remains far more politically powerful for those of Irish descent than for their long-displaced Brahmin adversaries. Perhaps there was more than a kernel of truth in Archbishop William Henry O'Connell's haughty observation at the 1908 centennial of the Boston diocese at Boston's magnificent Cathedral of the Holy Cross that "the Puritan has passed; the Catholic remains."[46]

Archbishop O'Connell's 1908 pronouncement may have been premature for that year, as George Hibbard, a Yankee Republican, was Boston's mayor, but within two years it would be prophetic, as John Fitzgerald returned in triumph to City Hall. As Fitzgerald resumed the mayoralty, John McCormack, an 18-year-old law clerk, had learned his most important lesson: if he was to escape poverty and obscurity, public office was the route to take. And to succeed politically in Boston, one had to be of undeniable Irish descent.

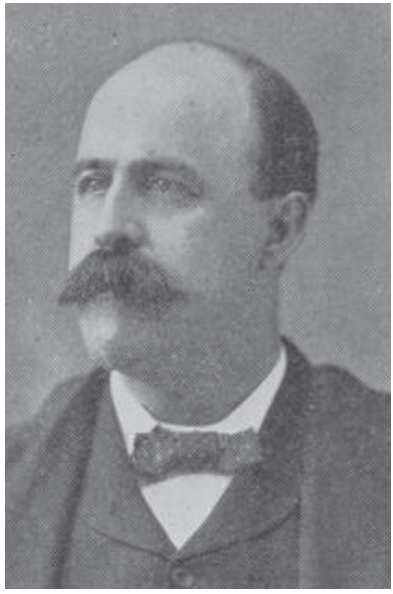
John McCormack knew that he needed the votes from his Irish-descended fellow citizens of South Boston if he was to hold public office. But he also knew that he could not claim undeniable Irish ancestry until he underwent a major reconstruction of his life and background. This would be "the greening" of John McCormack, and it would allow him to hold public office in Irish Boston for more than half a century.

The Political Gatekeepers of Irish Boston: Young John McCormack learned quickly that the only way to a successful political career in the highly fragmented and ethnically divided city of Boston was to maneuver your way through the baronial structure of the city's politics. The city had no single political machine. It had multiple power centers and local factions dominated both before and after the European War.[47] Commanding and competing personalities set the tone for Irish Boston's political life. The best known of these included Mayors John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley, and the ward bosses of the West End and East Boston, Martin Lomasney and Patrick Joseph "P.J." Kennedy respectively (Figure 2.1). These were the barons of Irish Boston's politics, and they were a tough and skeptical lot with similar life histories.

Martin Lomasney (1859–1933) from the West End was born to Mary Murray from Lismore, County Waterford. His father Maurice Lomasney was born in Fermoy, County Cork. They married when she was 30 and he 34; they had four sons, only two survived—Martin and Joseph. His father died when Martin was eleven, followed shortly by his mother. Martin and Joseph lived with their aunt and maternal grandmother who spoke only Gaelic. He left school in the 6th grade to work at a railway station selling newspapers.[48]

John F. Fitzgerald (1863–1950) from the North End had a more complicated background. Most sources agree that Fitzgerald's father, Tom Fitzgerald, was from County Wexford, but there is much confusion about his mother's real name and her Irish background. A number of biographies state that her name was Rosanna Cox,[49] while others contend that it was Rose Mary Murray.[50] The last word on the subject should belong to Rose Kennedy herself who stated in her autobiography, "My paternal grandparents Thomas Fitzgerald and Rose Mary Murray, made that grim voyage in the 1840s."[51]

All are agreed that Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy was named for her grandmother and the biographies all locate her Irish location as Wexford. According to Jack Kennedy, it was for political advantage that his grandfather John Fitzgerald chose to move his great-grandmother's birthplace from county to county—Limerick and Tipperary in the southernmost kingdom of Munster, Wexford in the eastern kingdom of Leinster, and Cavan in the northern kingdom of Ulster.[52]



a. Martin Lomasney

b. Patrick J. Kennedy

c. John F. Fitzgerald

d. James Michael Curley

Figure 2.1a–d The gatekeepers of Irish Boston: Martin Lomasney, Patrick J. Kennedy, John F. Fitzgerald, and James Michael Curley (Wikipedia.com portraits).

There is also agreement that both emigrated in the 1840s at the height of the Famine. Tom Fitzgerald started as a farmer in South Acton and later moved to Boston's North End becoming a grocer and liquor storeowner. He died when John was eighteen, three years after his mother's death. John Fitzgerald was the third of seven boys, two of whom died at an early age. He graduated from Boston Latin; and attended Boston College, but had to drop out of Harvard Medical School to support the younger boys. His first job was as a clerk at the Custom House.[53]

Patrick J. Kennedy (1858–1929) from East Boston was the son of Bridget Murphy and Patrick Kennedy, who were both born in County Wexford. They married in the United States and had four children, three daughters and a son. Patrick Sr. was dead at 35, shortly after the birth of his only son. Never finishing grade school, P.J. began work in his teens as a stevedore and longshoreman who eventually took over a bar in Haymarket Square and moved into the retail liquor business.[54]

James Michael Curley (1874–1958) of Roxbury was born to Sarah Clancy and Michael Curley both from the County Galway in the western kingdom of Connacht. They immigrated to the United States as teenagers and married when he was 21 and she 19. She had three babies, but only James Michael and his brother John survived. Curley's father was a hod carrier who died in 1884 at the age of 34, when James Michael, was only 10.[55]

The four gatekeepers were not born in Ireland, but their parents were and tales of Ireland's tragic history were carried by their parents and regularly refreshed by their recently arrived neighbors. Death was omnipresent and each of them had family members who had died young. If they seemed to be young men in a hurry to scamper up the political ladder in search of power and security, one should not be surprised.

Jim Curley was the youngest of the four and just 18 years older than John McCormack. He was the Irish gatekeeper with whom John would have the deepest relationship. While the fiefdoms of the other three were closer to downtown Boston and Beacon Hill, Curley's Roxbury base extended into South Boston and Dorchester where housing was cheap and jobs were scarce. The residents of these neighborhoods are the people who would have benefited most from Curley's four terms in City Hall. Jim Curley's family came from the western Irish county of Galway as did the family of McCormack's wife M. Harriet Joyce. Another connection between the two men was that both had been tutored for the law by the corruptible Republican Judge Charles Innes with McCormack qualifying for the bar while Curley dropped the course and never took the exam.

While McCormack knew the other gatekeepers, it was Joseph P. Kennedy, P. J. Kennedy's lone surviving son and Honey Fitz's son-in-law, with whom his dealings were the most problematic. As Jim Curley and Joe Kennedy made their respective moves in Boston, there was a key difference. Joe Kennedy's father, the East Boston barkeep and liquor dealer, provided much of the capital that Joe was able to parlay into the presidency of the Columbia Trust Company at the age of 25, Jim Curley's father was destitute and left ten-year-old Jim nothing when he died. Curley was sensitive about being a fatherless boy and it defined much of his response to life. According to Boston historian Charles Trout, "throughout Curley's career, he reserved a special place for

prominent men who had lost their fathers at an early age, or for men whose fathers had been so greatly reduced in circumstances that they could not protect their sons."[56]

When it came to their children, both men would provide paternal protection in the form of quality education; especially their sons. Joe Kennedy and Jim Curley each fathered nine children. Joe had five daughters and four sons, all of whom would reach adulthood and five would survive him: Rosemary, Eunice, Patricia, Jean, and Teddy. All four of his boys went to quality prep schools and Harvard and he guaranteed each one million dollars. While Joe Kennedy's nine children would provide him with almost thirty grandchildren, Jim Curley's nine children provided him with none.

Jim Curley's children had mixed educational experiences and unfortunate histories.[57] Curley had two daughters and seven sons, two of whom, twin sons John and Joseph, died in infancy.[58] Dorothea, his second daughter, would die at the age of fourteen of pneumonia. Only six of the Curleys survived to adulthood. Mary, the oldest girl, took courses at Harvard Extension, and it was she who would replace her mother Mary (Mae) Herlihy at Jim's side after her death left him a widower in 1930. Jack Beatty contends that she was the family liberal,[59] but her divorce from the abusive advertising executive Edward Donnelly would have closed the door to a political career in Irish Catholic Boston. Mary and Leo, the fifth child, would die on subsequent days in 1950 of reported cerebral hemorrhages. Leo's visible despondency at his sister's death led to rumors of suicide while other old-timers suspected that Mary and Leo had shared a deadly drug concoction at Mary's apartment.[60] Sadly, their fatal vice was alcoholism.

The two Curley sons best suited for successful lives were Francis, the youngest, who obtained two advanced degrees from the nearby Shadowbrook Seminary, then went into the Jesuit priesthood and served at Weston College; and James Jr., the eldest, who went to Boston Latin, Boston College, and Harvard Law. But James Jr., the Curley family's prince, was dead at 24 of a stomach embolism. He had been successful at Harvard Law and had caught the favorable attention of Professor Felix Frankfurter who found similar qualities in Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.[61] Jim apparently chose not to invest himself as deeply in the other boys although he was able to provide quality educations for each of them: Paul went to Boston Latin, Boston College, and Georgetown and was dead at 32 of alcoholism; Leo left Harvard Law after a professor criticized his father and transferred to Boston University Law to get his degree; and George went to New Prep, Andover, and Holy Cross. Curley's anger with Harvard at this time was such that when George received an acceptance letter from Harvard, Curley confessed in his autobiography that he had "torn up the letter informing him that his application had been acted upon favorably."[62] Survived by only two sons—Francis, the priest, and George, who was gay—Jim Curley was unable to pass down his political legacy. This was a harsh fate that Joe Kennedy clearly escaped.

Jim Curley had to ascend the political ladder on his own without a mentor.[63] As a result, Curley became a quintessential "loner" and never developed the sense of political interdependence that other politicians, including John McCormack, used to create successful coalitions.

Jim Curley and John McCormack: An Irish Poor Boy Alliance: Knowing Curley's temper and his great power to ridicule opponents, McCormack was always careful

around him. In his dealings with Curley, McCormack had two advantages that many of the other would-be Curley acolytes did not—a credible tale of a fatherless boyhood and a younger brother, Edward J. "Knocko," who would provide Curley with the South Boston "muscle" so necessary in the rough and tumble ward politics of the early-twentieth-century Boston Irish. Curley regularly included Knocko in his mayoral campaigns and named him assistant superintendent of markets, a job that gave Knocko the opportunity to inspect the meat lockers of the city's better restaurants and make off with sides of beef for his own restaurant in South Boston.

Boston's ambitious, poor Irish boys were linked by their ethnic origins and the Roman Catholic religion, but they had no common socializing experience in the region's prep schools and private colleges to reinforce those links. Unlike their Yankee rivals, they had no social and economic safety nets to break their falls from grace. Risks were real and the loss of public office could and did cast them into personal deprivation. With adverse consequences omnipresent in their lives, the young Irish Democratic politicians had to choose their factional loyalties carefully. Given that most factional loyalties were fluid and that many of the ward bosses had mercurial tempers, their careers could end before they had begun if they made an unwise decision. Maintaining and furthering their career trajectories while they danced between the city's factions was a clear test of their political skills. Silence was a virtue. Today's ally could become tomorrow's enemy. John McCormack understood these risks.

Risky Business: Young John McCormack had to impress the gatekeepers if he was to become a player in Boston politics. It was these tough and cynical men to whom John McCormack would present himself and his altered ancestry.

John McCormack's hardships were real and similar to those that had been overcome by Curley, Fitzgerald, Kennedy, and Lomasney, giving him a leg up over the hordes of other young Boston Irish aspirants. His hardships had made him "one of them," and he could be trusted. Had they known of his true ancestral background, he would not have been as well regarded. He might have been forgiven for altering the circumstances of his father's disappearance from his life and recasting his place among his surviving brothers. These were minor details. Undoubtedly, each of these men had relatives whom they disdained and had banished from their consciousness, but who continued to occupy earthly places. Their common Irishness provided a link between them that defined them against the Protestant political hierarchy whose power they coveted.

However, John McCormack was far less Irish than they. Only his maternal grandparents had come from Ireland. John knew that his Irishness was stretched, even if the gatekeepers did not. His ambivalence about his ancestry was so pronounced that it even appeared in the 1920 U.S. Census. John McCormack is reported to be a 28-year-old lawyer lodging at 29 Mt. Vernon Street in Dorchester, with a father born in Scotland and a mother born in Massachusetts.[64] For the third census in succession, the birthplace of John's father had been changed. In the 1900 Census, John's father Joseph McCormack reported his own birthplace as Canada. In 1910, his abandoned wife Mary Ellen made him a native of Ireland, and in 1920, John, his oldest surviving son, chose to make him a Scot. For John McCormack, who was then an elected member of

the Massachusetts House of Representatives, this was a risky decision. Fortunately for McCormack, at the time no Freedom of Information forms were available to catch the shifting birthplaces of his father.

Most troubling to his advancement was his paternal link to Scottish Canada. Joe McCormack's Canadian Scottish heritage was one that had to be well concealed if young John was to have any chance of success in Irish Boston. A Canadian heritage was a potentially career-ending problem. But to the powerful players in Boston's Irish political drama, John McCormack's tales of family poverty were verifiably authentic. They all knew the hardships of life along Dorchester Avenue and the numbered and lettered streets of South Boston. McCormack's aspirations to escape the circumstances of his upbringing were as real as their own. They had no need to examine it closely. Most important to them was that John McCormack himself was born in Southie and none of them had to travel to Andrew Square to establish the difficulties of his life. McCormack understood as clearly as did they how politics could be used to advance oneself and to alleviate the economic hardship of their Irish-descended constituents.

Notes

1 The delight of the British press at the departure of the Irish is captured in this editorial from the *London Times*, as quoted in Seamus MacManus, *The Story of the Irish Race*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Devin-Adair, 1945), p. 610n.

2 A first-person account of one such vessel is given by Robert Whyte, listed as "A Cabin Passenger," in *The Ocean Plague: Or a Voyage to Quebec in an Irish Emigrant Vessel* (Boston: Coolidge and Willey, 1848). Books commemorating the Famine's sesquicentennial include Edward Laxton, *The Famine Ships: The Irish Exodus to America, 1846–51* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); and Jim Rees, *A Farewell to Famine* (Arklow, Ireland: Dee-Jay Publications, 1995). MacManus lists a number of ships where more than half of the passengers died in the Atlantic crossing to Canada (*The Story of the Irish Race*, pp. 609–10.

3 New York City's settlements are recounted in Charles H. Andres, *Our Earliest Colonial Settlements: Their Diversities of Origin and Later Characteristics* (New York: New York University Press, 1933); and Edward R. Ellis, *The Epic of New York City* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966).

4 On Philadelphia's early settlements, see David Hackett Fischer's section, "North Midlands to the Delaware: The Friends Migration, 1675–1725," in his magisterial *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 419–609; and the early three-volume compilation of John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time*, revised by Willis P. Hazard (Philadelphia: E.S. Stuart, 1905).

5 A brief account of the "Highland Clearances" and their impact upon Canadian settlement may be found in J. D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd rev. ed. by Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker (London: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 320–24. The original version appeared in 1964. See also John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Penguin Books, 1963).

6 Books recounting the influence of the Scots-Irish in America include Ronald Chepesiuk, *The Scotch-Irish: From the North of Ireland to the Making of America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000); Barry Vann, *In Search of Ulster-Scots Land: The Birth and Geotheological Imagings of a Transatlantic People, 1603–1703* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). The most colorful of these books was written by U.S. Senator James Webb (Dem-Va.), *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004).

7 George Calvert, Lord Baltimore, intended that the settling of Maryland and Newfoundland would be religious sanctuaries for English Catholics; see T. K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 89. A fuller account of the family and its colony may be found in Clayton C. Hall, *The Lords Baltimore and the Maryland Palatinate: Six Lectures on Maryland's Colonial History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1902).

8 Edward Everett Hale, Letter I; "Preparations for Passage," dated December 3, 1851 in *Letters on Irish Emigration First Published in the Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston: Phillips, Samson & Co., 1852), p. 7.

9 Useful books documenting the faith brought to North America by the Puritans are Selma R. Williams, *Kings, Commoners, and Colonists: Puritan Politics in Old and New England, 1603–1660* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relationships in 17th Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944); and Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956).

10 A book on early New England settlements from an English perspective provocatively contends that there were more economic refugees than religious ones; see David Cressy, *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980). More recent scholarship includes Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

11 The original quotation is "Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a byword through the world." John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," a sermon delivered aboard the *Arbella* (1630). A clearer rendition may be found in Emily Morison Beck, ed., *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 15th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 264.

12 As contended by Oscar Handlin in *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation, 1790–1880*, new and revised edition (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 25. The contrast between Boston and Philadelphia is wonderfully recounted in E. Digby Balzell's *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

13 See Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*; and Thomas H. O'Connor's indispensable *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).

14 The enduring treatments of this era are Van Wyck Brooks's Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Flowering of New England* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1936); and F. O. Matthiesen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Era of Emerson and Whitman* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).

15 The most evocative depiction of Boston's social and cultural life in the two decades before the arrival of the Famine Irish may be found in Thomas H. O'Connor's fascinating *The Athens of America: Boston, 1825–1845* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

16 Quoted in Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 22.

17 Henry David Thoreau, *The Variorum Walden*, annotated by Walter Harding (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 173. My thanks are given to Mr. Andrew McLean for bringing this quotation to my attention.

18 Ibid., p. 174. The "brat" quotation appears on p. 173. A later effort to explain Thoreau's anti-Irish prejudice was undertaken in Frank Buckley, "Thoreau and the Irish," *New England Quarterly*, XIII (1940), pp. 389–400.

19 Letter of Ralph Waldo Emerson to Thomas Carlyle, September 26, 1864, *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834–1872*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Ticknor, 1886), p. 322.

20 Peter Temin, "The Industrialization of New England, 1830–1880," in Peter Temin, ed., *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 109–52. See also Thomas H. O'Connor's *Lords of the Loom, the Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1968). This point is made in Robert Dalzell's *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), chapter 5, "Philanthropy and the Uses of Wealth," pp. 113–63.

21 Books describing Boston's nineteenth-century growth include Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City upon a Hill: Boston since 1630* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston (1870–1900)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); and Walter Muir Whitehill's classic, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

22 Yankee Boston's resistance to the Irish has been told often; see O'Connor's *The Boston Irish*, chapters 2 and 3; and Oscar Handlin's *Boston's Immigrants, 1790–1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979).

23 Yankee Boston's antislavery societies and their activities are recounted in Lawrence Lader, *The Bold Brahmins: New England's War against Slavery* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961). There was also substantial statistical evidence of working-class resistance to slavery as well in New England; see Edward Magdol's *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social History of the Abolitionist's Constituency* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

24 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845).

25 The Lincoln-Stowe account appears in Charles Edward Stowe, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life* (1911), p. 203, and is refuted in Daniel R. Vollaro, "Lincoln, Stowe, and the 'Little Woman/Great War' Story: The Making, and Breaking of a Great American Anecdote," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, XXX (Winter 2009), pp. 1ff.

26 Kenneth Martis (ed.) with Ruthe Anderson Rowles (cartographer), *The Historical Atlas of United States Congressional Districts, 1789–1983* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1982), pp. 236 for Adams and 238 for McCormack.

27 See the Pulitzer Prize–winning biography, David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960).

28 Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).
29 The fullest treatment of the event remains Hiller B. Zobel's *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970).
30 See Frederick Cople Jaher, "The Politics of the Boston Brahmins, 1800–1860," in Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns, eds., *Boston 1700–1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 59–86. This appeared initially in Jaher's book, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).
31 American Catholic anxieties about the antislavery conflict's impact upon the church's emerging place in America are recounted in Madeleine H. Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944). A harsh characterization of antebellum Irish antipathy toward American blacks may be found in Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
32 O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, pp. 83–85.
33 The sixth census of 1840 listed Boston in fifth place with 93,383 residents, and the seventh census of 1850 listed it in third place with 136,881 residents.
34 Both James Michael Curley and his longtime adversary William Henry O'Connell were past masters of fomenting this particular ethno-class conflict interpretation.
35 The academic definition of "swamp Yankee" may be found in Ruth Schell's 1963 article "Swamp Yankee" in *American Speech*. She contends that it is a colloquialism for rural southern rural New England Yankee Protestants who lived in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and southeastern Massachusetts. See Ruth Schell, "Swamp Yankee," *American Speech*, XXXVIII (1963), pp. 121–23.
36 See Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800–1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980).
37 Garrison Nelson, "Running from New England: Will It Ever Lead the Nation Again?" for the online *New England Journal of Political Science*, III (Fall 2009), pp. 112–65; and "New England and the Presidency: Voting Bloc Shrinks as Educational Role Grows," *Boston Sunday Globe, Ideas* (December 28, 2003), p. D12.
38 The major source for the U.S. Senators is the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress: Bicentennial Edition, 1774–1989* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989) with online updates. Hereinafter referred to as *BDUSC* (1989 ed.).
39 The major source for governors is Robert Sobel and John Raimo (eds.), *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789–1978* (Westport, CT; Meckler Books, 1978), 4 vols. with online updates.
40 "The Presiding Officers, 1780–1980," in Cornelius Dalton, John Wirkkala, and Anne Thomas, eds., *Leading the Way: A History of the Massachusetts General Court, 1629–1980* (Boston: Office of the Secretary of State, 1984), pp. 373–427.
41 William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 153.
42 U.S. Census Office, *Population of the United States in 1860* from the 8th Census (Washington, DC: 1864), pp. 31–32. A valuable summary of these data may be found in Stephan Thernstrom (ed.), *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, 1972–1980* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 531.
43 Cornelius Dalton, John Wirkkala, and Anne Thomas, *Leading the Way: A History of the Massachusetts General Court, 1629–1980* (Boston: Office of the Secretary of State, 1984), p. 201.

44 Ethnic and religious data of the mayors may be found in Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, 1820–1980: Big City Mayors, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, St. Louis* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

45 *BDUSC* (1989 ed.), pp. 810–11. See O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, pp. 160–65; and Michael P. Curran, *Life of Patrick A. Collins* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press), 1906.

46 O'Connell's remarks were delivered on October 28, 1908, as quoted in James M. O'Toole's *Militant and Triumphant: William Henry O'Connell and the Catholic Church in Boston, 1859–1944* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 121. Earlier that year on January 29, 1908, at the same church, O'Connell had been installed as Boston's Archbishop; Dorothy G. Wayman, *Cardinal O'Connell of Boston: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1955), p. 139.

47 In addition to Thomas H. O'Connor's *The Boston Irish: A Political History*, a much more recent and livelier account is Gerard O'Neill's enjoyable *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown, 2012).

48 Books on Martin Lomasney include Leslie G. Ainley's biography, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Brice Humphries, 1949), and a fictionalized account in Joseph Dinneen's 1938 novel, *Ward Eight* (New York: reprinted by Arno Press, 1976).

49 Rosanna Cox is named as John Fitzgerald's mother in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds: An American Saga* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 13; Cindy Adams and Susan Crump, *Iron Rose: The Story of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy and Her Dynasty* (Dove, 1995), p. 27; and in Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown, 2012), p. 12. *Wikipedia* places Tom Fitzgerald's birthplace in Limerick and Rosanna Cox's in Cavan.

50 She is also identified as Rose Mary Murray in John Henry Cutler, *"Honey Fitz": Three Steps to the White House* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 37–38; Thomas Maier, *The Kennedys: America's Emerald Kings* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 52; Michael O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/ St. Martin's Press, 2005); Barbara A. Perry, *Rose Kennedy: The Life and Times of a Political Matriarch* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), p. 10.

51 Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Times to Remember* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 5.

52 Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 1.

53 Books on John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald include Cutler, *"Honey Fitz": Three Steps to the White House*; and Goodwin, *The Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds: An American Saga*.

54 Goodwin, *The Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds*, pp. 264–68. The County Wexford location of Bridget Murphy Kennedy's birthplace came from the author's telephonic interview with Mr. Andrew Pierce of the Boston Genealogical Research Associates, July 1999.

55 Books on Curley include Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874–1958)* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); Joseph Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James M. Curley of Boston* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949); and Curley's autobiography, *"I'd Do It Again": A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956); and most recently, Curley's best-known appearance is as the model for Mayor Frank Skeffington in the best-selling novel by Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1956).

56 Charles H. Trout, "Curley of Boston: The Search for Irish Legitimacy," in Formisano and Burns, *Boston, 1789–1980*, pp. 165–95; the quotation is on p. 191.

57 This section is derived from the two biographies, Dinneen's *The Purple Shamrock* and Beatty's *The Rascal King*, and Curley's autobiography, *"I'd Do It Again,"* ghostwritten by John Henry Cutler.

58 Curley's autobiography reported their deaths in 1921, *"I'd Do It Again,"* pp. 79 and 363, while Beatty reported it as 1922, *The Rascal King*, p. 236.

59 Beatty, *The Rascal King*, p. 15.

60 Old-time Boston reporters were always careful never to let harsh tales of powerful families enter their columns, but they were reporters after all and had a felt need to share those tales with others on an unattributed basis. It was from them that I heard this tale.

61 Frankfurter on James M. Curley Jr., "Since last we met, one of our number has gone forever. It is always terrible when death strikes youth and most terrible when there as the promise of a good life for himself and his community, as was true of young Curley." Quoted in Beatty, *The Rascal King*, p. 288.

62 Curley, *"I'd Do It Again,"* p. 79.

63 Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock*, pp. 21–22.

64 Fourteenth Census return for 1920:

State: Massachusetts; County: Suffolk; Township: Boston; Ward: 11 Enumeration District No. 303 indicates that John W. McCormack, was then lodging at 29 Mt. Vernon Street in Dorchester.

Race/				**Place of Birth**		
Name	**Relationship**	**Sex**	**Age**	**Person**	**Father**	**Mother**
McCormack, John W.	Lodger	WM	28 s	Mass.	Scotland	Mass.

3

The Reinvention of John McCormack

Tombstones tell tales. Not only do they indicate the final whereabouts of those lying beneath them, they also reveal the character and history of the survivors who pay to have the stones erected and inscribed.

Boston's most prestigious graveyards are downtown, two blocks from the crest of Beacon Hill where the majestic Bulfinch-designed State House looks down upon the hustling metropolis the city has become. Boston never became the "Hub of the Universe" which it hoped for in the nineteenth century, but today its citizens are sufficiently diverse to give the city an international flavor. The city's other title, "the Athens of America," has come closer to the mark. With more than a quarter of a million college students attending almost one hundred institutions of higher learning in the city and its neighboring suburbs, Boston can qualify as the nation's and perhaps the world's biggest college town.

Part of Boston's allure and much of its curse can be found in the graveyards of King's Chapel and the Old Granary wherein lie the city's Puritan aristocracy, who brought equal helpings of enlightenment and prejudice to this unique place. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans intended for Boston to radiate its goodness throughout the New World and reflect back to the Old World that a band of educated and devout worshippers could make an "errand into the wilderness" and create a Christian community to serve as a model of renewal and salvation for the benighted and decadent civilizations of Europe.

But the tombstones that have relevance for the life of U.S. Representative John W. McCormack lie in the further reaches of the city.[1]

The first tombstone, Sandbanks in Watertown

The first tombstone is located in Sandbanks, a small cemetery occupying a corner of Watertown. Across the town line in Cambridge, the adjacent Mount Auburn Cemetery dwarfs Sandbanks. Mount Auburn is where the luminaries of Massachusetts's intellectual life have been laid to rest. Situated only a few blocks from Harvard, Mount Auburn Cemetery has buried within it many of the school's most illustrious scholars. Among them are four Supreme Court Justices Joseph Story, Benjamin Curtis, Horace Gray, and Felix Frankfurter; the essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.; U.S. Senators Edward Everett and Charles Sumner; and the poets James Russell Lowell and John

Ciardi. Others buried there include Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Julia Ward Howe, who wrote the Union anthem, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The Mount Auburn Cemetery has been wonderfully landscaped with gardens and small ponds and flowered walkways leading one to the mausoleums and graves of its occupants. Part of the landscaping was a large 10-foot wall erected on the Cambridge-Watertown line separating the "garden cemetery" of Mount Auburn from Sandbanks. The wall is thickly made and was erected in 1920 to provide a clear boundary between the growing burial needs of Mount Auburn and the diminishing ones of Sandbanks. The wall was built shortly after the city's bitter and ethnically divisive Boston Police Strike of 1919.

The 1906 death certificate of James J. McCormack, the first of John McCormack's adolescent siblings to die, indicates that James was buried in "Mt. Auburn Cemetery (Watertown)."[2] A call to Mount Auburn in search of James's gravesite elicited a response which was hard to mistake. After being told that James J. McCormack was not located in the cemetery's registry, I was asked, "Was he a Catholic?" I said, "Yes" and was told that his gravesite was likely in the adjacent cemetery of Sandbanks and that I should call another cemetery in nearby Waltham where information about the occupants of Sandbanks could be found.

In Waltham at the Diocesan office of New Calvary Cemetery, I was presented with a small well-worn notebook with loose pages and a map of the Sandbanks graveyard. A search of the old record book indicated that 16-year-old James Joseph McCormack would be found in grave C of the 5th row in the East Range.

Finding Sandbanks was not easy. No street sign or guidepost led one to it and no sign on the dilapidated gates indicated its unique past. It had been years since anyone had been buried in Sandbanks, and maintenance had slipped. Many of the stones were askew and a number were broken. A longtime native Irish maintenance man who cared for three cemeteries contended that one can sometimes "feel a chill" from Sandbanks that is absent elsewhere. It was he who alerted me to the presence of the concrete fortress wall separating the two cemeteries. "The Protestants built that wall to keep us from them," he declaimed in a tone softened by an Irish brogue but hardened by the realization that the two defining cultures of this "City on a Hill" had to remain separated even in death.

Once arriving there, the next step of locating James's gravesite was less difficult. The cemetery map had accurately captured the unique land configuration of Sandbanks and the wall separating it from Mount Auburn Cemetery. No tombstone identified James's final location, but a small oblong one near grave C indicated that a Julia O'Brien had erected a tombstone with two of its sides inscribed.

On the side facing the graveyard, it read:	On the left side of the stone facing the entrance, it read:
Erected by Julia O'Brien in memory of her son Patrick J. O'Brien b. Boston May 18, 1853 d. Rochester, N.Y. October 17, 1882	Michael J. O'Brien b. Boston June 5, 1819 d. Boston October 13, 1881

Julia O'Brien had purchased this gravesite for her husband Michael, herself and her two children, Patrick and Mary Ellen. Julia and Michael O'Brien were the parents of Mary Ellen O'Brien McCormack and the maternal grandparents of James J. McCormack, who would always remain sixteen. But the tombstone contained an inaccuracy, for Michael J. O'Brien was not born in Boston. According to his naturalization papers, Michael O'Brien was born in County Cork, the most populous of the counties along Ireland's southern coast in the kingdom of Meinster. Those who arrived in Boston from Ireland in the years before the Civil War had to confront the Yankee ascendancy in its fullest glory.

There was no welcome in Yankee Boston for the immigrant Irish, so concealing an Irish birthplace was essential for economic survival, and both Michael and Julia O'Brien knew this well. This was the time of the "NINA" employment signs—"No Irish Need Apply."[3] In a jaunty doggerel rejoinder to these signs, it was often intoned, "Whoe'er writ it, writ it well, the same is writ on the gates of Hell, 'No Irish Need Apply.'"

On a cold February morning in 1906, 14-year-old John McCormack with his brothers Patrick, Edward, and Donald and his sister Catherine stood over this open grave. Mary Ellen bid farewell to James, the first of her three grown children to predecease her. No tombstone for James was placed there as he was laid in the plot reserved for Mary Ellen. It was in the gravesite of her parents and her brother Patrick for whom her oldest son was named. It may have been her only consolation that day. James's own father, Joseph H. McCormack, did not accompany his wife and the five remaining children to this gravesite. He had left the family apartment sometime the previous year and his whereabouts were unknown. Now they were six.

Some thought that Joe McCormack had returned to his native Prince Edward Island (PEI), the smallest of the Canadian Maritimes. Others believed that he was in an alcoholic haze between Boston and PEI. Perhaps he was dead. Where he went or why he left did not matter to the hardy band of Boston Irishmen he left behind. Joe McCormack was dead to them.

Fourteen-year-old John learned a number of important lessons that day. One was that Yankee Boston needed to separate itself even from dead Irishmen. Another was that altering a family history to escape poverty and gain employment was no sin, for there on the 1883 gravestone of his grandfather was the inscribed birthplace of Boston, but as John may well have known, Michael J. O'Brien was born in Ireland. Grandma Julia who paid to have the tombstone erected and inscribed knew this. If altering ancestry was the way to survival, so be it. It was good enough for Grandma Julia and it would be good enough for John when he too would be faced with providing his family history.

The Greening of Joe McCormack: Who was Joe McCormack? He was the absent father of a clan that would produce a son who was a heartbeat away from the presidency of the United States for fourteen months from November 22, 1963, to January 20, 1965. Joseph was born in Grant's Crossing, a small village located near Souris, a coastal town on the rough northeastern edge of PEI. He was raised by natives of the island whose ancestry could be traced back to the 1700s in Scotland. The names

on Joe McCormack's baptismal document are those of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee, both Roman Catholic natives of Souris. As recounted in the *Memorial Volume, The Scottish Catholics of Prince Edward Island, 1772–1922*[4]: "A settlement was formed at Launching Place in Kings County about the year 1796, composed of MacDonalds, MacPhees, MacCormacks and Walkers, all of whom had come from Scotland with Father MacEachern, and had spent the intervening years at Scotchfort."

In *Ten Farms Become a Town: A History of Souris, Prince Edward Island, 1700–1920*, local historian George Leard lists the names of both Scottish and Irish settlers arriving in Souris in the late eighteenth century. Special note is made of Scottish settlers in 1772, "That year five families who came out on the *Alexander*: John McCormack, Donald McCormack, Roderick McDonald, Roderick McIntosh, and Angus McIntyre settled in Lot 43."[5] The McPhees arrived six years later in 1778. The baptismal records of Joe McCormack and his siblings remain today in the parish hall of the first large Roman Catholic Church, St. Margaret of Scotland, established in that corner of the island. There were six children in the household of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee[6]:

Catherine, born in 1839
Sarah, born in 1840
John, born in 1843
Raphael, born in 1845
P. Edward, born in 1854
Joseph, born in 1857

It was Mrs. Viva E. Noyes, Joe McCormack's landlady, who filled out Joe's 1929 death certificate in Maine. Joe's father's name is listed as "unknown," but he is listed as having been a farmer born in Scotland. His mother's maiden name is listed as "Annie McCormick," and her place of birth is also listed as Scotland.[7] Yet, how much anyone shares with a landlady is debatable. In a place as tight as PEI, where only one divorce was recorded over a four-hundred-year period,[8] illegitimate children were acknowledged but relocated quickly among the God-fearing intact families of the community. Had the child been the offspring of an illicit interreligious Catholic-Protestant coupling, illegitimacy was declared and efforts would be made to place the child in a religiously appropriate home that would welcome yet another mouth to feed. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants on the island were genuine. Sometimes, but not always, the children of these misalliances might be fully integrated within the new families. Other times they may have shared the dinner table and the household chores, but not the inheritances. Those would only go to the acknowledged family members. And so it was with Joseph McCormack. When Donald McCormack died in 1891, none of his estate went to Joseph. All of it went to P. Edward McCormack, the one boy in the family who chose to remain on the farm.[9]

The site of Joe's crossing into the United States was Lewiston, Maine, during October 1877. Joseph H. McCormack of PEI had come to begin his new life. It was probably not

his first trip to the States, but this time he had a purpose and that was to become an American citizen. On the official U.S. document recording his arrival, Joe McCormack contended that he was born on October 29, 1860, making him 17 years of age and "being then a minor under the age of 18 years."[10] On the baptismal document back in PEI, Joseph McCormack was listed as being born in November 1857. This would have made him nineteen when he crossed into the United States. Joe McCormack's birth year as reported to the census takers in the 1900 U.S. Census Bureau was 1862. So from the very beginning of his arrival in the United States, Joe McCormack's American life history underwent occasional alteration.

Lying about his age at the outset would make no sense if one did not understand the suspicious mindset of immigrants who resented the paperwork demands of the American federal bureaucracy and gave them any answer which suited their personal purpose that day. For Joe McCormack on that October day, the toll exacted from minors was undoubtedly less than that exacted from adults. So why pay the full amount if you could escape it? Joe was now over the first hurdle.

Truth and fiction often intermingled in Joe McCormack's life.

Joe never concealed his PEI heritage. It is recorded as his birthplace in the immigration document that he filled out in 1877 in Lewiston, Maine, and in his 1885 marriage license. It is also recorded on all six of the Boston birth notices of his census-enumerated children, on the three death certificates of his deceased adult children, on the 1900 Census in Massachusetts, the 1920 Census in Maine, and in his 1929 obituary.

When his name first appeared in the July 1881 *Boston City Directory*, Joseph McCormack was listed as a "laborer."[11] Four months later and after he and many of South Boston's laborers promoted themselves to "engineer," Joe married Miss Margaret Degnan of Newton, Massachusetts.[12] She was of Irish ancestry and Joe was married as a Catholic. By altering his job description, he undoubtedly placated her parents and hopefully impressed the neighbors.

Margaret Degnan McCormack died of typhoid fever in 1883 at the age of 26.[13] Little is known of her, but the perils of childbirth and the travails of tenement life shortened the existence of many young Irishwomen. Margaret gave birth to a son, Henry, but shortly after his birth, Margaret took ill and died. Joe McCormack, the young widower, sent his infant son north to PEI to be raised by his eldest sister Catherine (Kate) McCormack Haley. Kate McCormack had married Thomas Haley. According to family legend, the Haleys had a "wonderful farm" and Henry would be raised away from the suffocating slums of South Boston. It was the first time that Joe McCormack had shifted his parental responsibilities to others. It would not be the last.

Henry McCormack would be eighteen when he died from tuberculosis in 1902, the same disease that would take the lives of Joe McCormack's three grown children from his second marriage.

The Resilient Mother: Margaret's death and Henry's departure for Canada forced a new beginning for Joe McCormack, and on April 7, 1885, the young widower

married Miss Mary Ellen O'Brien of Boston, Massachusetts.[14] However, Margaret's death haunted young Joe and he began to fall heavily under the influence of alcohol. Mary Ellen was born in Boston and raised in nearby Medford. It was her first and only marriage. Joe's sister Sarah McCormack Keller, who lived in nearby Field's Corner Dorchester, tried to warn young Mary Ellen not to marry Joe due to his alcohol problem, among other things, but Mary Ellen persisted. Charlotte Walsh Hannaway, the granddaughter of Sarah McCormack Keller, recalled that Mary Ellen fell victim to that great triumph of hope over experience with the declaration that "I love him and I will change him."[15] Charlotte Hannaway also recalled that "it was a tragedy" that drinking had ruined Joe McCormack.

Mary Ellen's father, Michael O'Brien, was born in County Cork, Ireland, and it is believed that her mother Julia Devereux was born in County Kerry. Michael and Julia would be John McCormack's most direct links to Ireland.

In Boston's *Registry of Marriages*, Joe McCormack is listed once again as an "engineer," and it was in Medford, a small city in Middlesex County outside of Cambridge, that the first child of Joe and Mary Ellen McCormack, Patrick Daniel, was born on January 17, 1886.[16] The priest officiating at the baptism at St. Joseph's on January 25, 1886, was Father William Henry O'Connell, who later became cardinal archbishop of Boston and the legendary nemesis of Boston's Mayor James Michael Curley.

The children came quickly for young Mary Ellen. By the time of the next birth, Joe and Mary Ellen had returned to South Boston. Catherine Amelia (Emily) was born on August 7, 1887, at 213 East Eighth Street and[17] barely a year passed when in August 1888, Robert was born. Robert only lived for ten months, and upon his death, he was buried in a corner of the Sandbanks cemetery where Mary Ellen's father and brother lay.[18] James Joseph was born on May 23, 1889, down the block at 432 East Eighth Street.

John William was born on December 21, 1891, three doors away at 426 East Eighth Street. Another baby, this time a girl, Mary, named for her mother, arrived on August 7, 1893, and would be baptized ten days later, but little can be found of her death and burial.[19] She did not live long enough to be recorded by the census. From her first pregnancy in 1885 to her 1902 miscarriage, Mary Ellen carried twelve babies in 17 years. Eight were born but only six lived long enough to be enumerated in the Federal Census. Sadness may have been her one constant companion.

To feed his growing family, Joe worked as a stonemason. But like many of his neighbors, he had an uneven occupational and residential history. As the family's financial prospects increased, larger and more expensive places were sought for housing. Joe once even owned a building, but apparently lost it during the Panic of 1893, one of America's market-based economic collapses.[20] The money to pay for the home would have come from the estate of Julia O'Brien, Mary Ellen's mother who died of "senile dementia" in 1892.[21]

In 1894 and 1895, the *City Directory* recorded Joseph McCormack living in two places—Joseph McCormack, the mason, living at 261 East Eighth Street; and Joseph

McCormack, the clerk, living at 33 Seneca Street in the city's South End. It appears as if Joe was then living apart from the family. It was his first separation from Mary Ellen, but not his last.

Only one Joseph McCormack appeared in the 1896 *Directory*, and he is listed at 1 Ellery Terrace in South Boston. The births resumed. Edward was born on New Year's Day in January 1896.[22] And the moves continued. In 1897, the family moved a few blocks down from Andrew Square to 788 Dorchester Avenue, and in 1898 and 1899, they are listed at 2 Woodward Place. The last child to survive infancy was born in April 1899 and named Daniel. Often listed as Donald, he was the youngest and smallest boy. Part of the confusion lay in the fact that in Gaelic, the name is "Donal" and it is the root of both names. But within the family, Donald's nickname was "Buttons." His birth certificate lists the family home at 470 Dorchester Avenue, a South Boston residence smaller in size and value than most of their neighbors.[23] This was where both the 1900 *Directory* and Census found the McCormack clan.

In periods of financial decline the family was obliged to move to more modest and inexpensive housing. This surely weighed on their sense of well-being and security. This was the context for John McCormack's childhood. By the time of his ninth birthday, John had moved six times. More would follow.

By the time John McCormack was 17, the family had moved at least fourteen times according to the annual *City Directory*. Each of these moves was within a six-block radius in Boston's Andrew Square, a rough-edged crossroads linking South Boston to Dorchester. Most of the residences were small two-bedroom apartments that were far too small for a family of eight. How many other places the McCormack family occupied between their recorded addresses in the *City Directories* is unknown, but there is little doubt these moves were often made quickly and without notice.

It was not unusual for poor families to ricochet around the neighborhood to beat the rent. As John's brother Edward "Knocko" McCormack recalled, "You never had no regular address. You just stayed in one place as long as the landlord let you and then you moved on."[24] According to historian Lester Gordon, based on interviews with John, rent was about $1.50 a week for a three-room tenement and some weeks that was too much to pay.[25] Food, most often dried fish and potatoes, came from the local welfare office. Driftwood for the family's stove was provided by the boys' scavenger hunts along the mud flats of Carson Beach, while trips to the railroad yards would yield stray lumps of coal for heat to counter the harsh chill winds that blew off the bay.

The weekly rentals had become increasingly difficult for Joe McCormack. Every move meant a new configuration of beds. Adjustments in sleeping arrangements accompanied the birth of each new child. Essential furniture such as beds and dressers became increasingly dilapidated with each successive move. Mary Ellen's kitchen pots and pans as well as her dishes and cutlery were also damaged in the frequent moves. The children's few possessions—toys, dolls, and books—were always moved and they were likely the only constants in their young lives. Their school clothes shifted from

older child to younger child and the McCormack children surely stood out as they sat among their slightly more affluent classmates. Their poverty accompanied them everywhere.

Construction in Boston was not booming as it was elsewhere in urban America. Boston had lost ground to the newer metropolises of the Midwest. In the 1850 Census—the first following the arrival of the Famine Irish—Boston ranked third among the nation's cities trailing only New York City and Baltimore. By the 1870 Census, the city had slipped to seventh place. This meant that there were fewer construction jobs and the competition for them was heated. The hiring agents who placed men for these jobs were immensely aware of their power, and they made sure that "their own kind" were first in line to receive them. For Irish hiring agents, the initial determinant was an Irish birthplace and if scarcity was even more severe, the counties of origin within Ireland would determine the assignment of jobs. "Kerries" and "Corkies" often battled it out at the hiring halls.

By this time Joe McCormack had become a day laborer. His Maritime ancestry limited his employment opportunities. While he was a big man and well suited for construction work, his Canadian accent and the Scottish cast of his countenance placed him near the end of the line at the hiring halls. These jobs were fundamentally unstable. They paid well when you worked, but work was not always available. Often Boston's rainy weather and harsh winters would shut down job sites. Over that you had no control. Other times you weren't paid when intemperance gained the upper hand in your personal life and you didn't show up for work.

Most of Joe's daily wages were left at the tavern long before he arrived home, if he arrived home at all. Joe was a hard drinker. He was not the first man to find solace in a bottle, nor the last. All of the wonderful tales of drinking bonhomie among the Irish, be they native or Bostonian, reverberate in the cultural ethos. A man with little self-control like the Canadian Scotsman Joe McCormack, Irish Boston's drinking ethos quickly engulfed him.

"Were it not for whiskey, the Irish would rule the world" is a phrase trotted out to explain why the wonderful affability, charm, and eloquence so often attributed to the Irish did not result in their attainment of great material possessions or places of earthly prominence. But those who utter this phrase most often are Irishmen themselves who seem to gain wry enjoyment from this acknowledgment of their inability to match their promise with their performance.[26]

The family shrinks

The family snapshot as recorded in the 1900 Census has Joseph H. McCormack, age 38, a stonemason living at 470 Dorchester Avenue.[27] His wife Mary E. is listed at age 36. The McCormack household as recorded in the Twelfth Census return for 1900:

State: Massachusetts; County: Suffolk; Township: Boston; Ward: 15 Enumeration District No. 1370

					Race/ Place of Birth		
Name	**Relationship**	**Sex**	**Birthdate**	**Age**	**Person**	**Father**	**Mother.**
Joseph H.	Head	WM	Apr 1862	38 M	Canada Eng.	same	same
Mary E.	Wife	WF	Oct 1863	36 M	Mass.	Ireland	Ireland
Patrick D.	Son	WM	Jan 1886	14 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.
Catherine E.	Daughter	WF	Aug 1887	12 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.
James J.	Son	WM	May 1889	11 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.
John W.	Son	WM	Dec 1891	8 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.
Edward	Son	WM	Jan 1896	4 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.
Daniel	Son	WM	Apr 1899	1 s	Mass.	Canada Eng.	Mass.

And the whereabouts of the household's six children:

Patrick D. McCormack, Son, 14.

Catherine E. McCormack, Daughter, 12, at school.

James J. McCormack, Son, 11, at school.

John W. McCormack, Son, 8, at school.

Edward McCormack, Son, 4.

Daniel McCormack, Son, 1.

In the 1900 U.S. Census, Joe reported three months of unemployment in the previous year. But it was his commitment to his wife and children that was even shakier. A year later, the family left 470 Dorchester Avenue to return to 1 Ellery Terrace. Joe's irregular work history was familiar to his Canadian neighbors. Those who had known Joe McCormack back on PEI regarded him as a drunk, a rake, a small-time swindler, and an abusive husband.[28] Those behaviors continued in Boston, leading to further tension within the family.

Flight to Canada: Sometime in 1901, a pregnant Mary Ellen McCormack gathered up her six children—Patrick, Catherine, James, John, Edward, and Donald—and fled from Boston to escape Joe's alcoholic rages. She fled to the farm of Thomas and Kate McCormack Haley near Souris on PEI. Kate Haley was the oldest daughter of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee McCormack, the farm family that raised Joe. The town of Souris, a small community of farmers and fishermen, is on the east coast of PEI in Kings County. Poor soil in Souris led farm families to export their children as well as their produce. The farms are small, mostly between fifty and one hundred acres. The Haley farm, the "wonderful farm" of family legend, was one of the smaller ones—a fifty-acre hillside farm with a one-a-half story farmhouse. It was barely large enough for Kate and Tom Haley, their daughter Mary Ellen, the young farmhand, Archie Howlett, and the sickly Harry McCormack, the only child of Joe McCormack's first marriage and half-brother to John McCormack.

The dwelling was much too small for Mary Ellen's brood. Three adults and nine children in one small house stretched the meager resources of the Haleys and Mary Ellen's presence was not wholly welcomed. A further tragedy befell Mary Ellen when the child she was carrying died.

News of the death of her infant son reached Father Ronald Bernard McDonald, the parish priest of St. Mary's in Souris, but he refused to bury the baby in consecrated ground because Mary Ellen had "abandoned the family home" in Boston.[29] So shortly afterward, Mary Ellen, her six children, and the Haleys buried the baby's body in the field behind St. Mary's Cemetery. Harry McCormack, the baby's 18-year-old half-brother, soon followed in February 1902. Unlike the baby, Harry got a tombstone and consecrated ground.

Word of Joe McCormack's impending arrival on the Island led to another flight. Mary Ellen gathered up the remaining six children and returned to Boston. Neither she nor John ever returned to PEI. To an intelligent and impressionable ten-year-old such as John McCormack, the inhospitality of the Canadian townsmen toward his mother and his siblings may have contributed to his desire to conceal his Canadian heritage. Forgiveness is in short supply when family extinction is at hand.

Another story about Joe McCormack that residents of Souris retell is how he came back from Boston and agreed to paint the house of a family in town, whose prominence in Catholic circles was established by having a bishop among their forebears. Joe painted the house with inferior paint that washed away during the first serious rainstorm. He then elicited more money from the family for better paint but disappeared with the money, leaving this prominent family with an unpainted house and some serious chagrin. This was the last that Souris would see of Joe McCormack. When he later abandoned the family household, he went to Maine to avoid his former neighbors in PEI.

Back in Boston, Joe resumed his paternal role in the McCormack household. It was 1902. Mary Ellen's pregnancies ceased and the coldness of the dinner table can only be imagined. The household continued to move as Joe's economic deficiencies continued. The *Directory* located the family at 499 Southampton Street in 1903 and then up to the Dorchester line at 15 Boston Street in 1904 and next door to 17 Boston Street in 1905. Family legend contends that Joseph H. McCormack died that year.

Whatever demons that beset Joe, they won. By 1905, failing fortunes and an ailing family had taken their toll. Married to a practicing Catholic, divorce was not possible, so Joe opted for desertion—the "poor man's divorce"—abandoning his family to the hardships of urban life in America. This was how one ended marriages in Joe's native PEI; so one afternoon he hopped the Boston & Maine Railroad and headed north, deserting his family to gain employment as a stonecutter along the Atlantic's edge, which served as the major corridor between PEI and the city of Boston.

The fatherless family

Again the diminished family moved. This time to 93 Mercer Street, back to the edge of East Eighth Street where the early births had occurred. It is here that the family would

suffer its greatest losses. From the summer of 1905 through the autumn of 1906, the McCormack family agonized through the illness and loss of two of its grown children, James and Catherine.

The first piece of tragic news arrived in August 1905, when James Joseph McCormack was diagnosed with "phthisis." James Joseph was the second surviving son, the one who bore his father's name, and he was to be the family standard-bearer. James Joseph was closest in age to John who turned fourteen in December 1905. However, "phthisis" is a Latin euphemism, for what truly ailed James Joseph was active tuberculosis and its diagnosis would have terrible ramifications for the McCormack family. James Joseph lingered for six months until he died on February 15, 1906, at the age of sixteen. Now they were six. With the departure of Joe McCormack from the household and James Joseph taking ill, sleeping arrangements would have been adjusted once again. Sister Catherine would have moved into her mother's bed. Her bed would have been given over to James. The three younger boys—John, Edward, and Daniel—would have slept together.

The family rallied around James Joseph, but their resources were dwindling. Mary Ellen's health had suffered greatly from her twelve pregnancies and she had developed "chronic nephritis" a lingering back pain that sapped her extraordinary strength and robbed her of her once-proud erect bearing. Her decreased mobility and the lack of proper nutrition led her to gain far more weight than her frame could bear making it physically difficult for her to move her dying 16-year-old son James Joseph from his sickbed to the toilet.

In other cultures and societies, Catherine, Mary Ellen's 18-year-old daughter, would have handled this difficult chore, but among the Catholic Irish, be they native or Bostonian, any intimacy among young adults was prohibited. Brothers and sisters were not exempt from this proscription.[30] Worse however was that the family's unawareness of James Joseph's ailment led them to believe that he did not have the dreaded and highly contagious TB bacillus.

Mary Ellen's nephritis was exacerbated by tuberculosis, but because she did not have the coughing and wheezing symptoms most common to the disease known as "consumption," it was not known that she had become a carrier. By having Catherine sleep beside her, Mary Ellen carried the disease from her son James to her daughter Catherine, regularly exposing her to the TB bacillus. Three months after James Joseph died, Catherine was diagnosed with tuberculosis.

John's eighth grade graduation from the John Andrew Grammar School that June may have been the family's only triumph that year, for it meant that he was now employable. It was John's long hours in school and delivering newspapers that may have saved his life by keeping him away from the disease-ridden apartment. His immediate post-school employment by the Western Union Telegraph Company and later by the Boston Curb Exchange kept him even further away. John did suffer a partially collapsed lung as a result of being grazed by tuberculosis, but it never took full hold.

Throughout the horrible summer of 1906, the slender, blond, and pretty Catherine Amelia, known as "Kitty" to her younger Walsh cousins, struggled to breathe through the narrowing passages of her TB-infested lungs. Four months after she had come under

a doctor's care, on October 2, 1906, John McCormack's only surviving sister, who had just turned nineteen, succumbed to acute tuberculosis. Celeste Walsh, granddaughter of Sarah McCormack Keller, vividly remembered the McCormack family's recounting of this death and the reaction of her cousin John. "Jack was so young when she died. There was nothing he could do."[31]

The family was more prepared for this death than they were for that of James. With the meager earnings of her brothers Patrick and John, a cemetery plot was purchased for Catherine in Mt. Benedict Cemetery in West Roxbury. This cemetery was in a rural part of the city, but it was Catholic, new, and clearly a cut above Sandbanks. Twice within the year of Joe McCormack's disappearance and John McCormack's last full year of formal education, death had come to the McCormacks. Now they were five.

Good Irish Catholic families annually honored the memories of those babies who had died before their births and those who died before their baptisms and whose souls resided in the "limbo of the infants." In the McCormack household where death already reigned, its return to their home and its claim on two more children—two beloved teenagers—further scarred the family's survivors.

It is doubtful if John realized that his first major outlay as a full-time worker was to pay for a cemetery plot for his teenage sister. Sometimes there are no choices. On that October morning, the four remaining siblings—Patrick, John, Edward, and Donald—gathered at their sister's grave. Once again, Mary Ellen stood alone over her daughter's grave with no comfort from her husband, Catherine's father.

From 1905 to 1910, Mary Ellen tried to keep up appearances and continued to list Joe with the *City Directory* as living in the family apartment in their next three moves to 3 Vinton Place, 49 Vinton Street, and to 47 Vinton Street. By the 1910 U.S. Census, Joe was no longer listed among the inhabitants of 47 Vinton Street in South Boston. Five years after his "death," the illusion of Joe's return to the apartment was finally put to rest. The census takers arrived once again and it was considered unwise to lie to them. Unlike the *City Directory* which only required the completion of a simple form, the census takers came into the home and counted heads. Joe's departure would not be concealed any longer.

The 1910 family snapshot was a diminished one.

Thirteenth Census return for 1910:

State: Massachusetts; County: Suffolk; Township: Boston; Ward: 16 Enumeration District No. 1492

Mary E. McCormack of 47 Vinton Street.

		Race/		Place of Birth		
Name	**Relationship**	**Sex**	**Age**	**Person**	**Father**	**Mother**
Mary E.	Head	WF	50 M1	Mass.	Ire-English	Ire-English
Patrick D.	Son	WM	24 s	Mass.	Ire-English	Mass.
John W.	Son	WM	18 s	Mass.	Ire-English	Mass.
Edward	Son	WM	14 s	Mass.	Ire-English	Mass.
Daniel	Son	WM	11 s	Mass.	Ire-English	Mass.

Under occupation,

Mary E. McCormack, is listed as "none";
Patrick D. McCormack, "Hostler, Stable"'
John W. McCormack, "Clerk lawyer's Office";
Edward, "Messenger boy, Telegraph"; and
Donald [*sic*] "none."

Although Mary Ellen's occupation was listed as "none," John remembered vividly how hard his mother worked to provide aid and comfort to her neighbors. "My dear mother wielded a tremendous influence upon me. I had an intense love for her. She was a good neighbor to the other families that lived in the community; whenever they had any troubles, they'd come to her and she was sort of the counselor and the advisor."[32]

But Mary Ellen harbored anger about Joe's departure and disappointment with her Canadian in-laws. It led her to provide the 1910 census taker with an altered history for the father of her four remaining sons. Rather than have her boys listed as having a Canadian father, the boys were given a paternal ancestry matching her own. The country from whence the father of the boys came was now listed was "Ire. English." Joe McCormack had been reinvented as an English-speaking Irishman. Canada was disappearing from the family history.

Gone are the names of Catherine and James, the siblings closest to John and the ones whose deaths may have pained him the most. The loss of her daughter was undoubtedly the deepest hurt of all for Mary Ellen McCormack. It was family tradition to say that Joe McCormack had died, but Boston newspaper records, coroner accounts, and archdiocesan reports indicate no formal notice of Joseph's death.

The post-Census changes

As recorded in the 1910 Census, John was now employed as a "Clerk lawyer's Office." It was a step up from his initial full-time job as a messenger boy, the job that enabled him to be discovered by William Way of Plymouth who had a Boston office. Way's initial offer was a raise of fifty cents a week to work for him. It was a half dollar that would change young John's life forever.[33] Now elevated to a clerk in Way's office, John was eagerly devouring the law books on Way's shelves. But death struck once again. This time it was 24-year-old Patrick, John's oldest brother whose 1911 death certificate is the last Massachusetts document to identify Joe McCormack as a Canadian and Mary Ellen as a Bostonian. Now they were four.

Once again, the diminished family gathered at Mt. Benedict in West Roxbury and Patrick was buried beside his sister Catherine. For Mary Ellen McCormack, this was the third of her grown children to depart this life. Two others, Robert and Mary, had died in infancy and four miscarried. Death had been a constant companion in these harsh years of her life and her motherhood. Twenty-seven years of carrying her children from one cramped and dreary apartment to another had dramatically shortened her life and filled it with unspeakable hardships. Two years later in 1913, she would join her daughter and sons in death, a victim of myocardial disease, exacerbated by chronic

nephritis and abetted by tuberculosis—a disease that, in retrospect, she may well have unknowingly spread among her children. She was only 52. Now they were three.

It was at this time that 21-year-old John McCormack, ready to pass the bar examination, began the reinvention of his life. It was a successful reinvention, carrying him far from Andrew Square to the Speaker's chair in the nation's Capitol, third in line to the presidency. But on this day, filling out his mother's death certificate, his only concern was with the family remnants of himself and his two young brothers.

The first step

Mary Ellen's 1858 birth certificate, 1885 marriage license, and church records listed her parents as Michael and Julia O'Brien. But her 1913 death certificate listed her parents as Patrick O'Brien and Bridget Daley, both of Ireland. As the oldest living son, it was almost certainly John who would have given this information to the funeral home.

There are many possible explanations for the discrepancy, some more generous than others. Perhaps John did not know the names of his maternal grandparents. Michael O'Brien died before John was born and Grandmother Julia died when he was less than a year old. A second possibility may have been that Patrick and Bridget O'Brien were indeed his grandparents, but they had died early. Perhaps Mary Ellen had been raised by godparents whose names were, as noted on marriage and church records, Michael and Julia Devereux O'Brien.

However, John was 14 when James was buried in Sandbanks and he stood beside the tombstone of Michael and Patrick O'Brien, erected by his grandmother Julia. He was aware of how his grandmother had reinvented his grandfather as a Bostonian. John also knew that this inscription was literally chiseled in stone so when John filled out his own mother's death certificate seven years later, he chose not to identify Michael and Julia as his mother's parents, but instead took the names of two others and placed them on his mother's death certificate. Patrick and Bridget were the names of the patron saints of Ireland, so these names were common throughout Irish Boston. Patrick O'Brien was the name of his mother's deceased brother. Bridget Daley was the maiden name of a woman whose son, Bernard Twitchell, was born eight days after James and was baptized on the same day and at the same church, South Boston's Gate of Heaven.[34] She and her husband Paul lived on Dorchester Street near where it joined East Eighth Street. Who knows how many times Mary Ellen and Bridget may have walked together carrying their baby boys?

It was a dangerous move to place Bridget Daley's name on the certificate, but John and his two young brothers, Edward and Donald, no longer had a generational barrier between them and their own mortality. The document was partially true; Mary Ellen's parents had been born in Ireland. It was her parents' names on the certificate that were false. Grandma Julia understood that to be Irish in nineteenth-century Boston jeopardized the welfare of a family. John understood that to be Irish in twentieth-century Boston was essential for family success so there should be no surprise that the death certificates of both Edward McCormack in 1963 and John in 1980 list Ireland

as the birthplaces of each of their parents. Apart from John's father listed as a native of Scotland in the 1920 Census, the surviving McCormacks were now officially Irish.

As John McCormack and his two brothers buried their mother in Mt. Benedict in 1913, alongside her oldest son and her last daughter, Joe McCormack once again made no appearance. On her death certificate, Mary Ellen McCormack's marital status is listed as "M" for "Married," not "W" for "Widowed." Joe had been gone for eight years but John knew that his father was still alive. After all, Joe's sister Sarah McCormack Keller, the younger of the two McCormack girls whose parents had raised Joe McCormack in PEI, lived in Dorchester's Fields Corner less than three miles away from South Boston's Andrew Square.

In the condolence letter that Sarah's granddaughter Charlotte Walsh Hannaway sent to her second cousin Eddie McCormack after John's death in 1980, she wrote that John visited Aunt Sarah frequently and that John once told her[35]:

> Do you think I ever forget the past. How good Aunt Sarah was to my dear Mother—Then he told me a story which took place before I was born. As he said I used to go to see Aunt Sarah often and I would walk from South Boston to Fields Corner. I would hurry for I knew when I reached the house she would open the door and with her arms out wide draw me in to her and I was cold and it was good. Then she would take me in to the kitchen where there was always a fire which Uncle Dan kept going from the day he started until the day he put it out. She would feed me and have me lay down on the couch. She was a bright spot in my early life and she had so little for herself. This day she took off my shoes and the hole was the first thing she saw. She called Uncle Dan and showed it to him—saying look in the shop and see if you have a pair to fit Jack, if not fix these shoes for him. My grandfather in years back had a shoe store even in those days there were thefts and after a number of them he gave up the store but saved the merchandise. Jack went on to say that on his way back to S.B. it took him twice as long to get there as he stopped every so often to admire his new shoes.

John knew as did Sarah, her daughter Amy Keller Walsh and Amy's husband Chauncey Walsh that Joe McCormack was still alive somewhere, but he was dead to the boys if not yet to God.

John was 21, Edward was 18, and Daniel was just 14. They were three young fatherless boys who had just buried their mother. Living in a city with little compassion for its ethnic poor, despair might have been the expected response. But John McCormack would not be denied. He was on the verge of becoming a lawyer and he would have a professional credential to make his way in Boston. But which Boston: Yankee Boston or Irish Boston?

Knocko and Buttons, the surviving brothers

In the 1910 Census, the four McCormack boys—Patrick, John, Edward, and Daniel—were listed as living at home with their mother. This would be the last census to record

Mary Ellen and Patrick McCormack. By decade's end, Mary Ellen and Patrick would both be dead and the surviving members of the McCormack family would materialize elsewhere. Patrick, then 24 years old, was working in a stable; 14-year-old Edward was out of school and working as a messenger boy for the Telegraph Company; and eleven-year-old Daniel was out of school with no occupation. That an eleven-year-old boy should be unemployed would not be surprising in present times, but Daniel was apparently old enough to work in the eyes of the census takers. John and the younger boys supplemented the family income with a large paper route, but only John had a regular income and had become the family's breadwinner before he left his teens.

The two younger boys, Edward and Daniel, stayed at home for a while. Edward remained in Boston and became a highly visible and colorful part of Irish Boston's political pageant. Within the family, Daniel's nickname was "Buttons." Following the death of his mother, Donald McCormack was considered an orphan and he left South Boston to escape the clutches of the good sisters at the Catholic orphanage known then as the Catholic Home for Destitute Children, but later euphemistically renamed the Home for Little Wanderers. Family legend had Buttons disappearing into the Southwest where he was employed selling paraphernalia to traveling carnival shows. He was not a "carnie," but he spent most of his time in their company.

Buttons was built tall and lean like John McCormack, much in the family mold of their father but thinner than John. He never married and spent most of his adult life in Texas.[36] His most promising business venture according to his cousins, the Walsh sisters, was to engage in Texas land speculation, but those endeavors failed. He was once employed as an elevator operator at the U.S. Capitol Building. Clearly, this was a favor from his older brother as a way of qualifying him for a federal government pension.

At one time, Daniel returned home to Boston, ill with cancer and lived for a short time with Charlotte Walsh Hannaway, the eldest daughter of his cousin Amy Keller Walsh. But the cold dampness of Boston and the warm dampness of Washington held no long-term appeal for Buttons, so he returned to Texas to die. Buttons lived in Aransas Pass, a small town on Texas's Gulf Coast, and died in Temple, Texas, at the Veterans Hospital in 1966.[37] Then Speaker John McCormack had the remains of his last brother flown home to Boston and buried in the Mt. Benedict Cemetery with his mother Mary Ellen, his sister Catherine, and his oldest brother, Patrick. It had been 60 years since all four of these McCormacks had been together on earth.

Knocko McCormack: A local icon

It was John McCormack's brother Edward J. McCormack, Sr. who was perceived to be the real deal in Irish South Boston.[38] Edward's loud, boisterous, and raucous ways were the stuff of local legend. To John McCormack who disdained nicknames, his brother was always Edward, but to South Boston, Edward was always known as "Knocko," an echo of his early career as a prizefighter. John's tall and lean physique was a sharp contrast to the burly one of Knocko who stood a little less than six feet, but weighed close to three hundred pounds.

Initially, Edward followed in John's path and worked as a messenger boy for the Telegraph Company. Like John, Edward dropped out of school to help the family's finances. But unlike John, Edward's beefy build suited him for rough and tumble work and he gravitated toward more physical labor as a stevedore on the docks of South Boston. These jobs paid more than delivering messages, but they did not hold the same promise of discovery and protégéship.

Edward grew strong and tough. He became an accomplished street fighter and a semiprofessional boxer who was accorded the nickname "Knocko" for obvious reasons. He was a human locomotive whose quick temper and powerful fists earned him local repute.

Knocko was a finalist at the 1918 New England Amateur Boxing matches in the 158-pound class, but lost when eventual champion "Billy Rush found Ed McCormack an easy proposition in the final bout. McCormack covered up from the start of the bout, preferring to take a licking than boxing."[39] Knocko's domain then became the taverns and bars of South Boston and Dorchester. He worked as a bouncer, barkeep, and a bookmaker. Knocko's was a life that placed him outside of respectable Boston and on the edges of its underworld.

He was a bootlegger during Prohibition and a tavern keeper after it. For many years, Knocko McCormack was the Grand Marshal of the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in South Boston. This is akin to being declared emperor in Southie. Every year, there would be a photograph of Knocko, wearing a tam-o-shanter and dressed in full military regalia from the highly decorated Yankee Division, riding astride his poor horse Jerry, leading the St. Patrick's Day Parade down Broadway. To the old-timers of South Boston, Knocko was a quintessential "Irish boyo" and in the words of former Massachusetts Senate President William M. Bulger, "while brother John was soft-spoken and courteous, brother Knocko was as self-effacing as a bass drum."[40]

One of Knocko's official roles was as assistant commissioner of markets for the city. Appointed most often during Jim Curley's administrations, Knocko would cruise through the city and drop in on its finest restaurants, Durgin Park and Lock-Obers among them, and decree that particular cuts of meat that hung in their refrigerated lockers had become spoiled. Not eager to offend the assistant commissioner of markets, the restaurant owners would surrender the "spoiled" meat to the commissioner without compensation. And the meat would make a miraculous recovery en route to South Boston where the regulars at his restaurant, the Wave Cottage, would be treated to a fine meaty sandwich for the simple price of a nickel. Knocko knew how to keep his friends and patrons well fed and well entertained.[41] And as reported in *Blood and Power*, "Knocko's Wave Cottage restaurant boasted a gambling den on the second floor."[42]

Knocko generally referred to his brother as "the Congy." To those who knew them both, such as Bill Bulger and U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill, John was "his complete opposite." But Knocko provided John with the Irish ethnic cover that he needed to maintain the support of his South Boston and Dorchester constituents. Knocko McCormack was a clear embodiment of Carl Wittke's stereotypical characterization of the Irish as a "warm-blooded and warm-hearted people . . . convivial and generous, sometimes to a fault, frequently improvident, and do not often come in conflict with

the law except for intemperance, minor offenses, and occasional difficulties arising from the political graft of some of our larger cities."[43]

This characterization does not fit John McCormack. John was better described by Wittke's depiction of the Scotch-Irish, "The Scotch-Irishman's tenacity, firmness, and determination, his courage and his self-reliance, have helped him to make a notable record in political leadership."[44] Wit, humor, and charm seem to be absent here. Of John McCormack, his protégé Tip O'Neill contended "that John McCormack was so conservative that he didn't burn the candle at one end."[45]

Knocko endeared himself to many of Southie's less fortunate souls. As described by Bill Bulger, "He had a special relationship with the Public Works Department and would pass out what he called 'snow buttons' entitling each recipient to a stint shoveling for the city in the winter."[46] With winter storms roaring off the ocean to regularly pelt the South Boston peninsula, these buttons were to be treasured during those harsh winters when heat and employment were scarce.

Knocko was an enforcer for the faction of Mayor James Michael Curley, It was a time when bare-knuckled brawls often defined the respective turf occupied by the various barons of the city. Having Knocko and his gang gave Curley an intimidating phalanx that could guarantee highly visible places for Curley placards and campaign leaflets. Tracking down rumors of illegal payoffs or illicit love affairs were also part of the trade practiced by the Knocko McCormacks of Boston. "Getting the goods" on someone was essential in the highly personalized campaign realm of Boston city politics. Sometimes, it wasn't really necessary to get the "goods," just let loose a few rumors that you had the "goods" in some of the city's major gathering posts and the city's hyperactive rumor mill would run amuck. It did not take much to kick that rumor mill in gear and a positive reputation that had taken years to build would evaporate overnight.

Jack Beatty's excellent biography of Jim Curley, *The Rascal King*, contended that Knocko McCormack was a man whose feelings Curley did not want to hurt.[47] The fact that Knocko had done many a "dirty deed" for James Michael and knew where many of the mayor's "bones were buried" gave Knocko a prominent place at Curley's table. Contributing to Knocko's uniqueness was the fact that his older brother John, "the Congy," held a post of great power within the U.S. House of Representatives. Should Knocko ever need federal immunity protections as encouragement to provide state's evidence against James Michael, John "the Congy" could arrange it. This would make it possible for Knocko to elude imprisonment, a fate which had befallen Jim Curley twice before. Fortunately, Knocko would be John McCormack's protection from the mercurial and grandiose ambitions of Jim Curley. It was more than Knocko's "feelings" which worried Jim Curley.

Knocko's family

In 1919, young Edward married Mary T. Coffey, a 19-year-old stenographer from Cambridge across the Charles River. She was a tall, slender brunette with a sharp wit

and an ability to stay out of the way of Knocko's quick temper. There were three children born to them: Mary E. (known as Mae), John W. II, and Edward J. Jr. Knowing that Harriet, John's wife, had shared with Mary, her sister-in-law, that "women's problems" had prevented her from conceiving a child, Knocko chose to name his oldest son John W. McCormack II. It was a way to honor his older brother who had kept the diminished family together.

Mae was tall and brunette like her mother and was a family favorite. On November 28, 1942, a horrendous fire broke out in Boston's Cocoanut Grove nightclub[48] and the life of Mae McCormack was lost along with hundreds of other revelers all unaware of how little care had been given by the nightclub's owners to the safety of its patrons. Rumors of payoffs by the nightclub's owner to corrupt city building inspectors were common throughout the stricken city.

Boston legend contends that Mayor Maurice Tobin, a Jim Curley rival, appeared at the wake of Mae McCormack to express his condolences to the McCormacks. Believing as did many in the city that corrupt city officials had winked at the Grove's multiple fire code violations, a disconsolate Knocko brushed aside the mayor's extended hand and sent a sledgehammer fist into his face.[49] The powerful punch did double duty for Mae's memory and for Tobin's disloyalty to Jim Curley in the previous two mayoral contests.

The Walsh cousins remembered that Mary T. was slow to recover from the death of her only daughter. It haunted her for the remaining half-century of her own life. Mary T. McCormack died early in 1997, outliving Knocko by more than 33 years and two of her three children, and she came within months of outliving her last child Edward Jr. who died shortly after her in the spring of the same year.

Knocko's two sons, John II and Edward Jr., were as dissimilar as he and his brother John. Although named John W. McCormack II to honor Knocko's brother, he soon acquired his father's talent for clocking various citizens of South Boston. Within the family, he was known as "Jacko" by his mother and brother.[50] But outside the family he was best known as "Jocko" McCormack.[51] Edward, the younger brother, was nicknamed "Bubba," and remembered his brother as "the best street fighter in South Boston."[52] It was a memory that Edward held with great pride. The boys had contrasting styles. Longtime residents of Southie have very fond memories of Jocko. "He was a lovable rogue," Anna Murphy of the Cork and Bull restaurant and bar recalled one afternoon, "he didn't give a shit for nothing."[53] As for Eddie, she opined, "He didn't do shit for South Boston." Not all of Southie's citizens appreciated Eddie's efforts to help implement the court-ordered desegregation school busing plan.

Jocko and Bubba played on Knocko's baseball and softball teams. From his command post at the Wave Cottage on P Street, Knocko made sure that his players performed competently on the field. For the player who struck out at the wrong time or whose error cost Knocko's team a victory, banishment from the bar was the usual punishment.[54] After a while, Knocko would forgive the misplay and the critical strike out and the teammate would be returned to the bar at the Wave Cottage. How often some teammates may have been through this cycle of banishment and forgiveness is hard to say, but this too was all part of the legend of Knocko McCormack.

Jocko McCormack was tall and good-looking, but he was similar to his father in his street-savvy and his hard edge. He too made it into the pantheon of Southie legends. One of the most endearing portraits of Jocko is contained in a column written by widely syndicated political columnist and author Jim Bishop, who got to know Jocko in the U.S. Navy during World War II and came to appreciate the fullness of his unique personality.[55] Jocko enlisted five days after the attack on Pearl Harbor and served on a few naval vessels that were hit and sunk by Japanese warships. He became known as "Cruiser-a-day McCormack." After the war, he went into private business eventually working for the Canteen Corporation servicing food and vending machines.

Jocko had a raconteur's gift for spinning colorful South Boston yarns, many featuring his father's exploits. Bill Bulger, who knew the McCormack boys well, observed that "unlike his brother, Jocko, who was a pie in the face of society, Eddie was smart and debonair, a study in silk; very smooth, very smooth."[56] Eddie was far more studious and conscientious. Respectability was his goal. A hockey player at South Boston High School, Edward had his share of local brawls, but it was the family's hope that he would develop more along the lines of Uncle John McCormack. So Edward was pointed on a course of academic achievement and legal training. He began his collegiate career at Colby College in Maine but transferred to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. Eddie shared that his big sister Mae had suggested that if he had to choose between West Point or Annapolis after transferring from Colby College that he go to the Naval Academy because the "honor code" at West Point would oblige him to "rat out" his classmates.[57] These were behaviors held in little regard by the very wary longtime residents of Irish South Boston.

The transfer was expedited by his uncle's position in the U.S. House, and it had the benefit of keeping Edward out of combat in World War II. This was a controversial decision. Knocko had fought in World War I with Massachusetts's highly decorated Yankee Division and sending his sons off to war was something his patriotism demanded, but his paternalism resisted. So Jocko went off to war and joined the navy while Edward remained at Annapolis. The fragility of the McCormack family, so vividly revealed again with the Cocoanut Grove fire, had to be protected. Uncle John had served in the army without facing combat in the Great War and had not been adversely affected politically by this occurrence, so why should the Annapolis stint hurt Eddie? Edward received his commission from the Naval Academy and met his noncombat postwar service requirements. Following his discharge from the navy, Edward enrolled at Boston University Law School. As the top student at the Law School, he served as editor of the *BU Law Review* in his senior year. But politics was still the family trade and Eddie began to position himself for advancement within the increasingly powerful Democratic Party of Massachusetts.

John McCormack's brothers and nephews gave him as much family as he was to have. Jocko married Lorna Izzo and had one son, Sean. Eddie married Emily Ruplis, who came from a family in South Boston's small but active Lithuanian community. She and Eddie had two boys, Edward J. III "Skip" and John W., named for Eddie's father and uncle. John McCormack was closer to Eddie's family than to Jocko's and after the

death of his wife Harriet in 1971, John and Emily would go to the movies together in Boston. As Eddie's cousin Charlotte Walsh Hannaway recalled in her condolence letter to Eddie and Emily[58]:

> So Emily as Jack grew older and was alone he needed someone and you filled that spot for him dear. I was always so happy and a lump would come in my throat when I would see you and Jack together especially at Uphams Corner at the Movies. Not that I liked a rememberance [sp] of a McCormack in that area but the two of you together father and daughter. Thank you dear for your sweetness to him.

Emily was as close to John as he was to having a daughter.

The Canadian shadow

John McCormack's family alterations, making his mother Irish-born, might have been forgiven. Her parents were Irish-born after all, but his father's Scottish Canadian ancestry would have been far more difficult to overcome. Young John's prospects for political advancement would have been seriously derailed had it been fully known. It was better glossed over than acknowledged. Forgiveness for this part of the reinvention would have been very slow in coming, if it came at all.

Canadian ancestry was not esteemed within the Boston Irish community. In the years following the Civil War, a number of Canadian-born Protestants arrived in Boston. Calling themselves "British-Americans," these Canadians had left behind a newly confederated Canada and a disdain for its mandated tolerance of French-speaking Roman Catholics in Quebec. These Maritime Protestants chose Boston over Toronto as the nearest metropolis within which to seek economic advancement. Boston was just a few hundred miles away by boat. Toronto seemed almost a continent away and it had to be traversed on land for hundreds of miles through hostile French-speaking Catholic villages and towns.

It was the Maritime Anglo-Scot Protestants, the self-identified British Americans, stout defenders of the Empire and Queen Victoria, who were seen as largely responsible for an outbreak of anti-Catholicism during the 1880s—the Gilded Age.[59] Boston's Brahmins seem to have avoided the more virulent of the anti-Catholic groups.[60] Succinctly stated by James J. Connolly[61]:

> While Boston's tradition of Catholic-Protestant tensions stretched back to the Pope's Day rioting of the colonial era, its late nineteenth-century manifestation had more immediate sources. The arrival of British Americans from Canada in the 1870s and 1880s on the heels of the great prewar Irish migration sparked conflict between the two groups as they wrestled for social, political, and economic advantage in Boston. It was these Canadian immigrants, rather than Boston's Yankee elite, who spearheaded the attack on Boston's Irish-Catholic community.

The anti-Irish violence was real. Future Roosevelt Administration U.S. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, a Congregationalist native of Worcester, Massachusetts, remembered how horrified she was by the hooliganism of the anti-Irish gangs in Boston when she visited the city as a young girl.[62]

To the future gatekeepers of Irish Boston—Patrick Kennedy (b. 1858), John Fitzgerald (b. 1863), Martin Lomasney (b. 1859), and Jim Curley (b. 1874)—whose youth was spent dodging anti-Irish Catholic prejudice, whether the Protestant hands hurling the stones at them were native-born or Canadian imports were distinctions without differences. The insults and indignities all seemed to have Protestant origins.

Needless to say, Canada and its relocated citizenry—the "Noveys"—held no vaunted location in the Boston Irish view of the world. To Boston's Irish, the term "Novey" meant anyone who had come from the Canadian Maritimes. Like most derisive appellations, it was applied with little distinction and it covered all of the Maritimers: the Nova Scotians, the New Brunswickers, Islanders from PEI, and the "Newfies" of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It was in the Maritimes in 1755 that the English undertook a major rehearsal of the forcible relocation of Catholics from a homeland. Aided with an expeditionary force of New Englanders, the English moved the French Catholics from Acadia to locations along the Eastern Seaboard in colonies such as Virginia and the Carolinas, as far from Acadia as possible.[63] By burning their villages and trampling their lands, it was hoped by the English that the defeated and dispirited Acadians would not return. Many Acadians returned to France, but for most of those families for whom North America had been home for more than a century, they chose to remain on the continent, hoping for the day when Acadia would once again be theirs. The best known of their relocations was down the Atlantic Coast and along the Gulf of Mexico, where thousands were brought to New Orleans in the French colony of Louisiana. From these refugees comes that wonderful tradition that defines much of that most unique of American cities—the "Cajun."[64] Replacing the Catholic Acadians on the fertile lands of the Maritimes were Highland Scots who had also been moved from their homelands as part of the euphemistically labeled "Highland Clearances."[65] These new settlements would be collectively known as "Nova Scotia" or "New Scotland."

Maine-born and Bowdoin-educated Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his extraordinarily popular poem "'Evangeline: A Maid of Acadia,'" the first epic poem of American literature, chronicled the tragic tale of the 1755 French Catholic diaspora from the land that they called Acadia and their beloved community of Grand Pre. "Evangeline" taught the children of the nineteenth century (and much of the twentieth century) that it was the noble and devout Catholic French who were the true white settlers of the Maritimes and that it was the English who were bullying interlopers and the disrupters of a peaceful idyllic community.[66] In his telling of the tale, Longfellow, a descendant of Yankees from Massachusetts and Maine, was careful to leave the unfortunately eager involvement of his New England Yankee forebears in this event from his rendering of the destruction of Grand Pre. However, citizens of Grand Pre remember to this day that it was not the British, but rather New England soldiers

from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire who disrupted its peaceable community.[67]

The anti-Catholic eruptions that accompanied the arrival of these Canadian descendants of Catholic displacers appeared as if they had similar designs on the Irish of Boston. To a people once displaced, such fears are not trivial. To be a "Novey," real or suspected, was a designation to be avoided in Irish Boston. And a Catholic "Novey" was no exception.

Easily the most conflicted of the Boston Irish gatekeepers on this issue was Boss Martin Lomasney, "the Mahatma" of the ethnically diverse Ward Eight in the city's West End. Lomasney was so sensitive about challenges to his Irish heritage that he was the only member of the 300-plus members of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1917 to declare that he was the issue of "Irish parents."[68] Lomasney's father had once spent time in Nova Scotia and his rivals suggested that Lomasney was a "Novey." Lomasney's parents were both gone in 1871, by the time that he was eleven, but he was so sensitive to these accusations that he carried his parent's marriage license and his own birth certificate in his waistcoat for the next 50 years. Lomasney's personal possession of these official documents created difficulty for those individuals who sought independent verification of his ancestry.[69]

Carrying the marriage license of one's deceased parents in the inner pocket of your waistcoat or in the top drawer of your desk indicates the defensiveness of these Irish-descended politicians to any hint that their Irish ancestry was tainted. These were documents that John McCormack did not possess and thankfully did not have to produce. There might have been no tale to tell here had they been requested.

John McCormack completes the reinvention

Armed with his bar examination credential, 21-year-old John McCormack planned his ascent into a successful career. Would it be Yankee Boston or Irish Boston that would be the path to success? John was well aware that success in Yankee Boston required a Pilgrim or a Puritan ancestor and a Harvard degree, and that the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the Harvard Alumni Association held the names of those on their lists close to their breasts. His name was not on either list, so he would have to launch his career in Irish Boston.

Irish Boston had its own requirements but they were less strict than those of Yankee Boston. Documentation was not necessary, but it helped. Being Catholic was essential but also expected. The successful combination of life experiences for advancement within Irish Boston was to be the son of an Irish immigrant and a widowed mother with younger siblings to support. These were the family histories of the political gatekeepers of the Boston Irish. It was they who controlled access to the lower rungs of the political ladder. Martin Lomasney of the West End on the backside of Beacon Hill, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald of the North End, Patrick J. "P.J." Kennedy of East Boston, and James Michael Curley of Roxbury were the four most powerful of the Irish gatekeepers.

In a May 18, 1971, interview shortly after leaving the House, John McCormack recounted his early life and it made him one of them[70]:

> Well, at the time of the death of my father I was a young man, a boy—thirteen years old. He was a stonemason. The family was left in very bad financial circumstances. I had graduated from the grammar school and I had to leave the grammar school to go to work in order to try to keep the family together. Our family consisted of my mother and two younger brothers.

Whatever he may have told the city, the reality was that John McCormack did not have "the right stuff" for these people. His father Joe McCormack was not born in Ireland but instead was a Canadian from the Maritimes. To South Boston, this made Joe McCormack a "two-boater" or "herring choker." As recounted to me by Boston College Professor of History Thomas O'Connor, a South Boston native and author of *The Boston Irish*, "two-boaters" were unwelcome.[71] "Rory, get the dory. There's a herrin' in the bay" was the anti-Maritimer refrain heard around Southie. The implication of this remark is that Maritimers would hop into their small boats and chase herring around the bays and inlets and once found, they would pull the fish out of the water with their bare hands and choke them.[72]

Furthermore, Joe McCormack was not only a "two-boater," but he may have even been a Scot. Heaven forbid. John's mother, Mary Ellen McCormack, was born in Boston. Her father and mother were born in Ireland, but she was not. And John was not the family's oldest sibling; Patrick, Catherine, and James were all older than John and past adolescence and into adulthood at the time of Joe McCormack's departure from the household. Desperation and ambition can work wonders, and John McCormack set about to recast himself in the prevailing model of Irish Boston's successful politicians.

This was a lesson he had learned from his grandfather's tombstone in Sandbanks. Family histories could be altered if survival was at stake. So John McCormack altered his history. Joe McCormack, born the son of a Scotswoman in PEI, was trouble. He may have been emotionally dead to his surviving sons, but there was no certainty that he was truly dead and gone. While the McCormack boys may not have known where Joe was living or working, one person who did know if Joe still lived was Sarah McCormack Keller. But Sarah was embarrassed by her brother's behavior and may not have known that John McCormack recast his father as a native Irishman who had died in 1905.

Mary Ellen O'Brien McCormack, who was born in Boston of Irish parents, would also be recast as a native of Ireland. It is doubtful if Mary Ellen would have appreciated this posthumous relocation of her birthplace, but she would have understood why it was necessary. The three older siblings—Patrick, Catherine, and James—would be recast as having died in infancy. That Patrick was 25, Catherine 19, and James 16 at the time of their deaths would have to be finessed. The three surviving McCormack brothers and their cousins may have remembered their departed siblings, but to the world their identities were lost to history. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Murphy gravesite with its Celtic cross at Mt. Benedict, a short 18 feet away from the final resting

place of Mary Ellen, Patrick, and Catherine, bore the names of three deaths on the tombstone. The three names of the Murphy dead were eerily identical to those of his own dead siblings—Patrick, James, and Catherine. Two of the Murphys had died in infancy. And so it would be. To those who would ask the Speaker, he would say that he, Edward, and Donald survived while the other McCormacks died in infancy and childhood.

The second tombstone, Mount Benedict, West Roxbury

In 1966, Donald died in Temple, Texas, leaving John as the family's last surviving son.[73] Brother Knocko had predeceased them both in 1963 and so it was left up to John to deal with Donald's remains. John was now Speaker of the House, and he had the remains of Donald, his youngest brother, flown to Boston and driven to Mt. Benedict Cemetery. John had the tombstone inscribed:

In Memory of My Mother
Mary
1861–1913
Donald
1901–1966
McCORMACK

Mary Ellen and Donald were memorialized on that tombstone but two other children—Patrick, the oldest son, and Catherine, the oldest daughter—who lay beside them were not memorialized. John knew that they were there. He had stood over both of their graves while his mother wept. But he could not acknowledge their presence. Acknowledging their presence in his mother's gravesite would have unraveled part of the life history that he had used to ascend the heights of Irish Boston. How could John McCormack have grown siblings when he had told people throughout his district and in Washington that his siblings had died in infancy? How indeed? The Boston Catholic Cemetery Association knew that there were four McCormacks, not just two, buried in Mt. Benedict Cemetery as indicated in their letter.[74]

Leaving their names off his mother's tombstone may have been the most difficult decision of his life at this time, the moment of his greatest success. During the previous twelve months of 1965, John McCormack had triumphantly presided over the U.S. House of Representatives during the 1st Session of the 89th Congress. This was "the Great Society Congress" and its legislative achievements came close to President Lyndon Johnson's goal of "out-Roosevelting Roosevelt." Even at the height of his political power and influence, John McCormack's altered life history had to remain in place.

If it was discovered that he had lied about the ages of his deceased siblings, then it was possible that there were other lies. Was his mother really born in Ireland as stated on Edward's death certificate[75] and on John's?[76] Or was she born in Boston as it says on

her own death certificate and those of James, Catherine, and Patrick and on the census returns of 1900 and 1910 and on all six of the birth notices of her enumerated children? What of Joe McCormack? Had he died in 1905 as contended in the family history? If so, why was there no Massachusetts death certificate or Boston obituary, funeral mass, or cemetery plot to mark his passing? John McCormack was obliged to reinvent his family history in order to account for these anomalies.

James in Watertown and Catherine and Patrick in West Roxbury are buried in unmarked graves. These three siblings had shared most of John McCormack's conscious childhood memories. Leaving them out of the family history must have been horribly painful. Failing to memorialize his brother and sister on the tombstone that they shared with his mother was not a grievous sin but it was a sin nevertheless. He had knowingly and deliberately dealt improperly with his family's dead.

Did he confess these sins to a Catholic priest? Most likely, it would have been to his dear South Boston pal Richard Cardinal Cushing. John was an active churchgoer and a man of extraordinary rectitude. The guilt and remorse of these events would have burdened him greatly. Did he live an exemplary life? Yes, he did. No more devoted husband has ever sat in the House of Representatives. John McCormack's devotion to Harriet, his wife of 51 years, was not only legendary but true.

To a man with John McCormack's integrity, these tales in the reconstruction of his life were undoubtedly troubling. This may explain his lifelong resistance to prying reporters and biographers. The third oldest son of a Canadian immigrant father and an abandoned mother is not as dramatic a life story as that of the oldest son of an Irish immigrant father and a widowed mother. Nor did it have the same resonance among those tough Boston Irish politicians whose help he would need to climb the political ladder.

John McCormack never talked of his father Joe, leading others to believe that he had died when John was young. John McCormack also never spoke of that horrible year which robbed him of both his brother James and his sister Catherine. No one knew of these losses. Some pains must remain private forever. But he talked often and lovingly of his mother. When the City of Boston renamed the Old Harbor Housing Project in South Boston the "Mary Ellen McCormack Development," it was Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives John W. McCormack who was invited to give the main address at its rededication. It was a speech about his mother that the Speaker could not complete. More than 50 years had passed since her death, but her memory moved him still.

Complementary identities

To his South Boston and Dorchester constituents, John McCormack was Irish. However, he was not as Irish as many might have liked. To South Boston natives such as historian Thomas O'Connor, John McCormack "looked like a herrin" or "herring choker"—a Maritimer.[77] He was tall and gaunt and dressed like an undertaker with his dark suits and white shirts. Never during his speakership and not even during his retirement did John McCormack relinquish that formality.

The *Irish Echo*'s anniversary article on John McCormack's death contrasted him with some other giants of the Boston Irish.[78] "John McCormack isn't as colorful a celt as was Richard Cardinal Cushing. Nor does he have the shamrock style of the legendary James Michael Curley or the celtic charisma of our much loved and missed President John Fitzgerald Kennedy."

Given the Scottishness of his roots, John McCormack would have been hard-pressed to generate a "shamrock style," never mind colorfulness and charisma. Such traits are seldom associated with the Scots. However, John McCormack was a quick study. In his years at the Constitutional Convention in Boston and at the Massachusetts State House, John McCormack gravitated toward those who had power. In his early years in Boston, it was the Yankee Protestants. In the U.S. House of Representatives, he gravitated toward the southerners. John McCormack learned early that in the House, "It was the southerners who had the power and you had to be friendly with the southerners if you wanted to succeed."[79] But among the southerners, there was an important regional element in his choice of best friends and political allies. The southerners he was closest to were from eastern Tennessee and eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, north Georgia, and north Alabama. These locales were situated in the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains—the regional heart of the Scotch-Irish. These curious hyphenated souls were the descendants of predominantly Presbyterian Scottish Lowlanders who first relocated to the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland and then moved westward across the Atlantic Ocean through Pennsylvania, the most religiously tolerant of the colonies, to the Alleghenies and down the Appalachian chain. They preceded by a century the arrival of the Catholic Irish on this continent.[80]

The southern Appalachian congressmen, both those born in and those representing that part of the nation, included a number of John McCormack's closest friends—Fred Vinson of Kentucky, Jere Cooper of Tennessee, Gene Cox of Georgia, Will Bankhead of north Alabama, and Alfred Bulwinkle of western North Carolina. Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas was John McCormack's greatest partner in shaping the legislative destiny of the House. Unbeknownst to Rayburn, John McCormack shared his ethnic origins. Rayburn's ancestors had originally come to Pennsylvania from the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland during the 1700s migration of the Scotch-Irish to America.[81] Moving first to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, the Rayburn family continued westward into east Tennessee. It was there in Roane County, a stronghold of the American Scotch-Irish in the southern Appalachian chain, that Sam Rayburn was born in 1882.

There was something about John McCormack that Rayburn and his fellow Scotch-Irishmen liked. Perhaps it was his Scotch-Irish "tenacity, firmness and determination." But John McCormack could not tell them what it was they liked, for if it had become known in South Boston that John McCormack was more Scotch-Irish and Canadian than immigrant Irish, his career in the House would have come to an abrupt and painful end.

So John McCormack concealed his true ethnic identity. His reinvented Irish identity helped him hold his South Boston seat, and his genuine Scotch-Irish behavioral style gained him friends and legislative allies in a chamber dominated by

these men of the mountains of the Southeast. In the end, both of his identities paid political dividends.

John McCormack learned his lesson well. As a young man, he had been careful not to play the Irish ethnic card, because he knew that his ancestry was tainted and those for whom Irishness was a defining feature of their candidacies would have called him on it. But because he didn't play that card, he was able to gain the support of non-Irishmen like his early Boston Yankee mentors William Way and Charles Innes, and the redoubtable Boston Brahmins Augustus Peabody Loring and Henry Lee Shattuck. In this way, he was able to bridge the rival tribes of Boston.

This lesson came in handy for the U.S. House of Representatives as well. John did not play the northern Catholic card with his southern Baptist and Presbyterian mentors in the House. He learned earlier than most that identity politics limit the height of one's reach and that those trusted by both sides in a conflict can ascend the quickest.

Before John McCormack could play his unique role in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, DC, he first had to navigate the troublesome and often treacherous shoals of Boston politics and the more subtle political dangers lurking within the Massachusetts State House. Designed by legendary architect Charles Bulfinch, the State House stood atop Beacon Hill. This was the place from which Boston was intended to send its message of godliness and righteousness to the world. It would not be an easy journey for John McCormack to make, but nothing in his life would be any harder than getting beyond the tragedy and poverty of his youth in Andrew Square. These circumstances may have left private scars but they toughened him for the public struggles that lay ahead.

Notes

1 Earlier versions of this research may be found in Garrison Nelson, "In the Shadows of John McCormack's Past Lie New Truths about His Life," *Boston Globe* (July 25, 1999), pp. E1–E3; "Irish Identity Politics: The Reinvention of Speaker John W. McCormack," *New England Journal of Public Policy*, XV (Fall/Winter 1999/2000), pp. 7–34; and "Unraveling the Reinvention of Speaker John W. McCormack," in Burdett A. Loomis, ed., *Extension of Remarks* of the Legislative Studies Section of the American Political Science Association (January 2000), pp. 2–7.

2 Death certificate of James J. McCormick [*sic*] at the Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics filed February 19, 1906:

> Name of Father: Joseph H McCormick [*sic*]
> Birthplace of Father: Sawyer [*sic*], PEI
> Name of Mother: Mary E O'Brien
> Birthplace of Mother: Boston

3 In a fascinating article by historian Richard Jensen, he contends that the NINA signs were less prevalent than assumed and that Irish hardships were less than generally described in his article "'No Irish Need Apply': A Myth of Victimization," *Journal of Social History*, XXXVI (Winter 2002), pp. 405–29.

4 From the "The Arrival of the First Scottish Emigrants in Prince Edward Island and After," *Memorial Volume, The Scottish Catholics of Prince Edward Island, 1772–1922*, Chapter XIII (Summerside, P.E.I.: Journal Publishing Co., 1922), p. 50. A fascinating history of the MacCormack family that traces its origins from Scotland through Ireland to the Canadian Maritimes is John R. MacCormack, *Highland Heritage & Freedom's Quest: Three Centuries of MacCormacks in Ireland, Scotland, Prince Edward Island and West Lake Ainslie, Nova Scotia* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: Kinloch Books, 1998).

5 Adele Townshend compiled from the Leard Papers, *Ten Farms Become a Town: A History of Souris, Prince Edward Island, 1700–1920* (Town of Souris, 1986; reprinted 1997), p. 13. George Leard's nephew Waldron Leard was the source of much of my information about the McCormack family in Souris.

6 The baptismal records were originally located in the now-closed St. Columba's Church and were moved to the larger St. Margaret of Scotland Church. The only addition that I believe need adding is the Charlottetown location of the PEI Provincial Archives.

7 Scotland is listed on both the death certificate of Joseph McCormick [*sic*] in the Maine Office of Vital Records State Archives dated February 7, 1929, and the 1929 burial certificate of Joseph McCormick [*sic*] in the Town of Waldoboro, Maine.

8 This unique datum may be found in William S. Dutton, "Prince Edward—The Island Where There Is No Divorce and No Crime," *The American Magazine* (December 1929), pp. 48 ff.

9 This is the assertion contained in Michael T. Meggison's "Feature Article" in the *P.E.I. Genealogical Society's Records*, entitled, "The P.E.I. Scottish and Irish Ancestry of John William McCormack, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives" (2000), p. 2.

10 U.S. naturalization papers on file at the Federal Records Center in Waltham, MA, indicate that Joseph McCormack of Prince Edward Island who entered the United States in 1877 at Lewiston, Maine, completed the naturalization process in Boston, MA, on October 20, 1884.

11 *Boston City Directory*, July 1881.

12 Marriages registered in the City of Newton, 1882, p. 203. On November 9, 1882, Joseph McCormick [*sic*] of Boston, 23, an engineer, born in Prince Edward Island, son of Daniel and Mary, was married for the first time to Margaret Degnan of Newton, 24, born in Ireland, daughter of John and Anna E., also married for the first time by the Reverend Dolan in Newton, Mass.

13 Death notice of Margaret Degnal [*sic*] McCormick [*sic*], 26, at 65 Baxter Street on December 29, 1883. She is listed as having died of typhoid fever. The notice lists her birthplace and that of her parents, John and Margaret, as Ireland, *Record of Deaths in Massachusetts, 1883.*

14 *Marriages Registered in the City of Boston, for 1885*. On April 7, 1885, Joseph McCormick [*sic*] of Boston, 25, an engineer, born in Prince Edward Island, son of Daniel and Mary, married for the second time to Mary O'Brien of Boston, 25, born in Boston, daughter of Michael and Julia, for the first time. The church records of St. James the Greater in Boston for that date are in Latin and indicate that "*Josephus McCormick [sic], ex loco Boston, Filium [of] Danielis et Mariam*" was married to "*Mariam O'Brien, ex loco eodum, Filiam [of] Michaelis et Julia*," were presented by "*D. J. McLane et Barbara Foley*" and were married by "*Giacobus J. O'Brien*," p. 54.

15 The quotation comes from a condolence letter of Mrs. Charlotte Walsh Hannaway to the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Jr., 1982, McCormack Family Papers. The letter was postmarked February 23, 1982. Mrs. Hannaway was the eldest daughter of Amy Keller Walsh whose mother Sarah McCormack Keller was the second daughter of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee of Prince Edward Island. In her letter, she states that she is "nearing the age of seventy-five" which would establish her year of birth as 1907. She was born two years after the disappearance of Joe McCormack from the family household.

16 Baptismal record indicates that Patrick Daniel McCormick [*sic*] born on January 17, 1886, was baptized on January 25, 1886. He was born to Joseph McCormick [*sic*] of Prince Edward Island and Mary O'Brien of Boston. The godparents were David McClean and Barbara Foley, who had been the witnesses at the wedding of Joe and Mary Ellen the previous year. The Reverend W. H. O'Connell presided, *Baptismal Register of St. Joseph's,* Vol. I, p. 34. Father O'Connell later became the first cardinal archbishop of Boston; see the excellent biography, James M. O'Toole, *Militant and Triumphant: William Henry O'Connell and the Catholic Church in Boston, 1859–1944* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 18–19, on his years in Medford.

17 Birth notice of Catherine Amelia McCormick [*sic*], born on August 7, 1887, at 213 East Eighth Street, South Boston to Joseph H., a mason, born in Prince Edward Island, and Mary E., born in Boston. *Index to Births in Massachusetts, 1886–1890*, 378: 156. On the baptism she is listed as Catherine E. McCormack in *St. Augustine's Register*, Vol. 2, p. 260.

18 Robert's burial is reported in *Registry of Deaths, Sandbanks, Watertown, Mass*., June 1889, p. 68. I could not locate a birth notice or a baptismal record for him.

19 Birth notice of Mary McCormick [*sic*], born on August 17, 1893 at 426 East Eighth Street, South Boston to Joseph H., a stonemason, born in Prince Edward Island and Mary E., born in Boston. *Index to Births in Massachusetts, 1891–1895*, 432: 173. The baptism is recorded at Gate of Heaven Church in South Boston, on August 27, 1893, p. 174.

20 This item appears in Ellen Coffey's 1994 Senior Honors Thesis at Stanford University, *The Impact of the New Deal on Boston Politics: The Early Career of John W. McCormack*, pp. 1–3. Ms. Coffey is the grandniece of Mary Coffey McCormack, the wife of Edward "Knocko" McCormack and John's sister-in-law. Ms. Coffey's well-written thesis depicts the house as "a wooden A-frame three stories high, perched on a hill overlooking the Boston Harbor," and "spacious, and light-filled" is more romantic than accurate. It is a tenement house slammed together with similar others on the densely populated East Eighth Street.

21 Death notice of Julia O'Brien on September 25, 1892, widow of Michael (maiden name Deady [*sic*]), at age 71 of "senile insanity" in Boston. She was living at 103 Mercer Street prior to her hospitalization. Her place of birth was listed as Ireland and her parents were listed as Michael and Margaret Boyle, both born in Ireland. *Deaths Registered in Boston, 1892*, p. 366.

22 Birth notice of Edward McCormack, born on January 1, 1896, at I Ellery Terrace, South Boston to Joseph H., a stonemason, born in Prince Edward Island and Mary E., born in Boston. *Index to Births in Massachusetts, 1896–1900*, 459: 355. The baptism on January 11, 1896, is recorded at St. Augustine's Church in South Boston, *Baptismal Register, 1894–1899*, Vol. III, p. 189.

23 Birth notice of Daniel McCormick [*sic*], born on April 14, 1899, at 470 Dorchester Avenue, South Boston to Joseph H., a stonemason, born in Prince Edward Island and Mary O'Brien, born in Boston. *Index to Births in Massachusetts, 1896–1900*, 487: 85. The baptism of Daniel McCormack on April 23, 1899, is recorded at St. Augustine's Church in South Boston, *Baptismal Register, 1894–1899*, Vol. III, p. 543.

24 Edward J. McCormack, Sr. as quoted in "Mr. Speaker," *TIME*, January 19, 1962, p. 17.

25 Lester Ira Gordon, *John McCormack and the Roosevelt Era*, PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1976, p. 15.

26 See J. R. Barrett, "Why Paddy Drank: The Social Importance of Whiskey in Pre-Famine Ireland," *Journal of Popular Culture*, XI (1977), pp. 155–66; and Edward Wakin, *Enter the Irish-American* (New York: Crowell, 1976), pp. 59–60; and O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, pp. 64–66 and 156–57.

27 Twelfth Census return for 1900: State: Massachusetts; County: Suffolk; Township: Boston; Ward: 15 Enumeration District No. 1370 indicates that Joseph H. McCormack of 470 Dorchester Street was born in "Canada Eng [lish]" and his wife Mary E. was born in Massachusetts.

28 These accounts were derived from a two-week research sojourn in 1997 where a number of Prince Edward Islanders spoke to me without attribution and sent me anonymous letters detailing events recounted to them by their parents and grandparents.

29 Correspondence with a person in Prince Edward Island familiar with the McCormack family history in Canada, May 28, 1998. A century later, this is still a sore point in Souris.

30 This insight was provided in an interview with Ms. Mary Ellen McWalters Melder of Rochester, NY, a U.S.-born descendant of Irish-born parents, July 1997.

31 Author's telephonic interview with John McCormack's cousin Miss Celeste Walsh, April 1997. Celeste Walsh was the granddaughter of Joe McCormack's sister Sarah McCormack Keller and the younger sister of Charlotte Walsh Hannaway.

32 John on Mary Ellen helping neighbors, Lester Gordon interviews, Tape 1, p. 5.

33 James Colbert, "50 Cent Raise in Pay Started McCormack on Political Career," *Boston Post*, April 10; 1956, p. 1.

34 Baptismal records of Gate of Heaven Church, South Boston, Mass. and kept on file at the Archdiocese of Boston Archives in Brighton, Mass. Bridget Daley was married to James Twitchell. Bernard Twitchell was born on May 31, 1889, and baptized on June 2, 1889, at Gate of Heaven. The names of James McCormack and Bernard Twitchell are only three lines apart on pages 83–84.

35 Condolence letter from Charlotte Walsh Hannaway to Eddie McCormack, in the McCormack Family Papers.

36 Most of my information about "Buttons" McCormack came from my telephonic interviews with John's cousin, Miss Celeste Walsh, April and May 1998.

37 Death certificate of Donald J. McCormack, died January 6, 1966, of "carcinoma of the breast," Texas Department of Health, February 14, 1966. "McCormack Rites Thronged in Dorchester," *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1966, p. 29.

38 Edward "Knocko" McCormack appears in the autobiography of William M. Bulger, *While the Music Lasts: My Life in Politics* (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 14–16. William Bulger is a longtime South Boston politician who served as president of the Massachusetts State Senate and as president of the University of Massachusetts.

39 "Boston Boxers Take Five of the New England Titles," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 19, 1918, p. 4.
40 Bulger, *While the Music Lasts*, pp. 14–16. The quotation appears on p. 14. See also Tip O'Neill's depiction of Knocko in *Man of the House*, pp. 121–22.
41 This account comes from Knocko's South Boston pals, eager to talk about him but reluctant to be identified.
42 Stephen Fox, *Blood and Power: Organized Crime in Twentieth Century America* (New York: William Morrow, 1989), p. 264.
43 Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America: The Saga of the Immigrant* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), p. 178. The book was originally published in 1939.
44 Ibid., p. 63.
45 O'Neill with Novak, *Man of the House*, p. 121.
46 Bulger, *While the Music Lasts*, p. 16.
47 Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874–1958)* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 492.
48 The fire has been recounted in three books: Paul Benzaquin, *Holocaust! Fire in Boston's Cocoanut Grove* (Boston: Braden Press, 1967) originally published by Henry Holt & Co. in New York in 1959; and Edward Keyes, *Cocoanut Grove* (New York: Atheneum, 1984). Benzaquin's book contends that 490 died. The Benzaquin and the Keyes books make no mention of Mae McCormack among the victims. The one book that does is the most recent one by John C. Esposito, *Fire in the Grove: The Cocoanut Grove Tragedy and Its Aftermath* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005).
49 This account comes from Esposito, *Fire in the Grove*, p. 211.
50 E-mails from Knocko McCormack's grandsons, Sean and Edward III, to the author, July 31, 2015.
51 See his newspaper obituary, "John W. (Jocko) McCormack, 62, vending machine representative," *Boston Globe*, September 28, 1982, p. 21.
52 Author's interview with the Hon. Edward J. McCormack Jr., Boston, May 1995.
53 Author's interview with Ms. Anna Murphy, South Boston, March 1997.
54 Multiple South Boston informants told me this including Boston's former mayor, the Hon. Raymond Flynn, November 1999.
55 Jim Bishop, "Hail and Farewell [to Jocko McCormack]," King Features, *Reading (Pa.) Eagle*, October 20, 1982, p. 7. When Jocko died, the *Back of the Yards Journal*, a local Chicago paper on the city's Southwest side, republished the *Boston Globe*'s obituary and an even longer one of their own reminiscences of Jocko's visits, "Back of the Yards mourns loss, a patriot and father eulogized by friend," October 6, 1982, pp. 1 and 15.
56 Bulger, *While the Music Lasts*, p. 91.
57 Author's interview with the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Boston, July 1995.
58 The quotation comes from a February 23, 1982, condolence letter of Mrs. Charlotte Walsh Hannaway to the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Jr., 1982, McCormack Family Papers.
59 See Arthur Mann's valuable *Yankee Reformers in the Urban Age: Social Reform in Boston, 1880–1900* (New York: Harper Torchbooks edition, 1966), pp. 42–43, for instances of British-American anti-Catholic prejudice in the Gilded Age of Boston.
60 This is the contention of Barbara Miller Solomon, in her "Brahmins and Irishmen in the 1880's," in her *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), p. 49.
61 James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900–1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 18.

62 Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities A Political Portrait Drawing on the Papers of Frances Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969), p. 105.

63 The most recent account of Acadia and its troubles may be found in Charles D. Mahaffie, Jr., *A Land of Discord Always: Acadia from the Beginning to the Expulsion of Its People, 1604-1755* (Camden, ME: Down East Books, 1995).

64 William Faulkner Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979).

65 A brief account of the "Highland Clearances" and their impact upon Canadian settlement may be found in J. D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd rev. ed. by Bruce Lenman and Geoffrey Parker (London: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 320–24. The original version appeared in 1964.

66 Evangeline was translated throughout the world and was the inspiration for a number of operas and one movie. A nineteenth-century account of the poem's early popularity may be found in Noah Porter, *Evangeline: The Place, the Story, and the Poem* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1892).

67 The long-standing involvement of New Englanders in the region is presented in John Bartlet Brebner, *New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada* (New York: B. Franklin, 1927) reprinted by Archon Books of Hampden, CT, in 1965.

68 Lomasney's entry reads: "5th Suffolk, Boston, born there of Irish parents, Dec. 3, 1859." *A Souvenir of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention; Boston, 1917-18-19* (Stoughton, MA: A.M. Bridgman, 1919), p. 78. At the convention, Lomasney served on the Committee on the Bill of Rights while 26-year-old John McCormack served on the Committee on Form and Phraseology, p. 81.

69 In his chapter on "'Czar' Martin Lomasney," Tulane University political scientist Harold Zink states that "Mr. Lomasney claims Boston as native city in spite of persistent rumors to the effect that Nova Scotia deserves that honor. The doubt as to his birthplace arises from the absence of record in parish or public archives of Boston. However, Mr. Lomasney has never taken out naturalization papers, has repeatedly insisted that he was born in Boston down on South Margin Street, and states that he has a birth certificate and a baptismal record bearing out his claim." See his book, *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 69.

70 Transcribed interview with John W. McCormack conducted by Mr. Edward Kraft, May 18, 1971. The family history quotation appears on pp. 2–3. These papers, hereinafter referred to as McCormack Family Papers, were provided to me by the Speaker's late nephew, the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Jr. in March 1997. A more public recounting of the tale appears in a reminiscing article by McCormack in "I Remember When I Was Thirteen," in Leo P. Danwer, ed., *I Remember Southie* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1976), pp. 119–21. Thanks are extended to Mr. Paul Wright of the University of Massachusetts-Boston for locating this short article.

71 Author's telephonic interview with Professor Thomas H. O'Connor of Boston College, June 1997.

72 Author's interviews with three Maritime-descended Bostonians including a staff member of the Canadian Consulate in Boston confirmed this interpretation, August 1999.

73 Death certificate of Donald J. McCormack, filed at the Texas Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, on January 11, 1966, indicates that Donald J. McCormack, a painter, died at the Veterans Administration Center in Temple, Texas, on January

7, 1966, of carcinoma of the breast exacerbated by chronic bronchitis and his parents are listed as Joseph McCormack and Mary O'Brien. His birthplace is listed as Massachusetts and his birth date as "4-14-1900" which varies from that on the birth notice, the baptismal record, and the census returns.

74 A letter to the author from Mr. John Kelley, the Business Agent of the Boston Catholic Cemetery Association, dated April 7, 1997, contains a list of the McCormack's buried in grave 1915—section 2 of Mt. Benedict Cemetery in West Roxbury, Massachusetts contains the names of:

> Catherine A. McCormick Age 19 Date 10/3/1906
> 93 Mercer St., So. Boston
>
> Patrick H. McCormick Age 24 Date 3/30/1911
> 47 Vinton St., So. Boston
>
> Mary McCormick Age 52 Date 5/12/1913
> 47 Vinton St., So. Boston
>
> Donald J. McCormack Age 65 Date 1/10/1966
> Temple, Texas

However, the records are slightly askew. Patrick was 25 (January 17, 1886 to April 4, 1911) when he died and Donald or Daniel was 66 (April 14, 1899 to January 7, 1966). Also, the records have Patrick buried five days before he died. Apparently, there was some confusion at the funeral home.

75 Death certificate of Edward J. McCormack in the Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics filed on November 20, 1963:

> line 17: Name of Father: Joseph H. McCormack
> line 18: Birthplace of Father (City) (State or country) Ireland
> line 19: Maiden Name of Mother: Mary E. O'Brien
> line 20: Birthplace of Mother (City) (State or country) Ireland

76 Death certificate of John William McCormack in the Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics filed on November 24, 1980:

> line 15a: Father-Full Name: Joseph McCormack
> line 15b: State of Birth (if not in U.S.A., name country) Ireland
> line 16a: Mother-Name (Given) (Maiden): Mary O'Brien line
> 16b: State of Birth (if not in U.S.A., name country) Ireland

77 Author's telephonic interview with Professor Thomas H. O'Connor, Boston College, July 1998.

78 Maureen Connell, "Remembrances of Those Who Died on November 22 . . . especially John W. McCormack," *Boston Irish Echo* (November 21, 1981), p. 10.

79 Author's telephonic interview with the Hon. John W. McCormack, Boston, April 1977. William V. Shannon makes just this point about McCormack's House career, in *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 341–42. Shannon also indicated that McCormack seldom returned to Boston and spent most of his weekends in Washington.

80 Books on the Scotch-Irish in America, *infra.* Chapter 2, note 17.

81 Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, p. 12. A wonderful account of the Scotch-Irish migration and its impact upon America may be found in "Borderlands to the Backcountry: The Flight from North Britain, 1717–1775," in David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed*, pp. 605–782.

4

The Ascent: Yankee Mentors, Irish Gatekeepers, and Harriet

From Messenger Boy to Attorney-at-Law: A True Horatio Alger Tale: Happy childhoods were rare among the poorer South Boston Irish. Tenement apartments were small, cramped, and poorly ventilated. They were breeding grounds for disease. Consequently, one had to go outside for fresh air and any semblance of social life. For the Boston Irish, social life revolved around the neighborhood squares. John McCormack's adolescence was filled with activities in and around Andrew Square and Everett Square named for two of Boston's notable statesmen, the Civil War Governor John Andrew and the redoubtable U.S. Senator Edward Everett.

Other places that provided a haven from the harshness of tenement life for John McCormack were the Catholic Church which gave comfort and the John A. Andrew School that instilled a love of learning and inspiration for a better life.

Young John was a great reader who devoured the "rags-to-riches" tales of Boston-born Horatio Alger Jr. The side street defining the South Boston block where 470 Dorchester Avenue met the curb was named for Horatio Alger. Alger's books were among the most widely read in the years of John McCormack's youth for they held out the glorious possibility of social mobility in this land of opportunity. By the time of World War I, it is estimated that sales of his books totaled over sixteen million.[1]

Social analysts have often challenged the "rags-to-riches" theme and have marshaled impressive evidence to suggest that it is more myth than reality.[2] In political life, it is usually called the "log cabin myth," which states that every young person, regardless of social origins, can rise to the top of the political ladder by dint of hard work, native intelligence, and unassailable integrity. The urban equivalent of the "log cabin" would be the "three-decker" and the "tenement apartment."

While President Abraham Lincoln is the best-known example of this myth, it has been regularly refueled. Three examples suffice: President Bill Clinton, the son of a widowed nurse from Hope, Arkansas; Governor Michael Dukakis, the Massachusetts-born son of struggling Greek immigrants; and President Barack Obama, the Hawaiian-born mixed-race son of a Kansas-born mother and a Kenya-born father.

John McCormack enjoyed the Alger stories and urged Americans to continue reading them. As he recalled in a 1973 interview, "I was an intense reader of Horatio Alger and also of Dick and Frank Merriwells in the dime novels because they'd always

overcome great difficulties."[3] John's nephew Edward J. McCormack, Jr., the onetime attorney general of Massachusetts, related that John was called "little Dick" because of his affinity for the Burt L. Standish dime novels about Frank and Dick Merriwell, the star baseball-playing brothers at Yale.[4] John was a good athlete and at six-foot-two and rangy, he often played first base on the neighborhood baseball teams in Andrew Square, the rough-edged intersection that joined South Boston and Dorchester.

Tailoring his life to fit the Alger-like models would not be difficult. John had all of the raw materials. Long hours of work supporting one's widowed mother and younger siblings defined the Alger hero. However, the truly successful Alger hero did not toil obscurely in the coalmines and sweatshops, but visibly on street corners and at newsstands. This enabled their discovered by a prominent older man who would sponsor them after witnessing some heroic deed.

John McCormack's jobs gave him the necessary visibility. He took his first job in 1906 at the age of 14 with the Western Union Telegraph Company at $3.00 per week. He took this job shortly after his graduation from the John Andrew Grammar School in South Boston. This was the horrible year marked painfully by the deaths of his 16-year-old brother James and his 19-year-old sister Catherine. Ironically, it was John's time in school and at work that kept him far from the tenement apartment where the tuberculosis bacillus raged and laid waste to his vulnerable siblings.

Later that year, he changed employers and joined the Boston Curb Exchange as a messenger boy for a brokerage firm at $3.50 per week. This multiplied his trips into the city's financial districts where he could be more visible and more likely to be discovered. Sure enough, it happened.

William Way and Charles Innes: Two Yankee Protestant mentors

In 1907, John McCormack's life would change forever. While on his errands for the Boston Curb Exchange, he was discovered by the most important person of his early career—Mr. William T. Way, Esq. Way was a lawyer born in Boston's Roxbury section, back when it was a Yankee enclave, and not the Irish one of Jim Curley. Way was impressed enough with young John to hire him as a messenger boy for his Summer Street law firm at $4.00 per week.[5] With $4.00 a week in his pocket, John McCormack could cover the $2.00 per week rent for the family apartment. The sadly diminished McCormack family could remain together in one place for a little while longer. Mary Ellen McCormack's good boy would provide.

William Way was an old Yankee. His mother came from a long-established Roxbury family and his father was born in Rochester, Vermont. Like the oldest of the Yankees, William Way was a descendant of a Revolutionary War veteran, Nathaniel Maynard, his grandfather. Way himself was born in 1864, the last full year of the Civil War. He was a public school graduate who had trained for the law in his father's office and admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1890.[6]

In 1907 when he discovered 15-year-old John McCormack, Way was 43 years old and in his seventh year as a Master in Chancery. Way married late in life and had no children so in the classic mold of Horatio Alger benefactors, he was amenable to discovering and promoting protégés. In William Way, John McCormack had found his first great mentor and an Alger-like route out of poverty and obscurity.

> He looked upon me as sort of a son and encouraged me to study law. Then there was some of his clients would take an interest in me and encourage me to study law in the office. Mr. Way played a very, very important part—William T. Way—in my whole life, particularly those years in his office.

John McCormack placed himself wholly in the care of Attorney Way. In the 1910 Census, 18-year-old John McCormack still lived at home at 47 Vinton Street in South Boston, but his employment was listed as "clerk, lawyer's office." With the encouragement of William Way; John McCormack had begun the formal study of the law in 1909 at the age of 17.[7] It was Way who raised young McCormack from messenger boy to office clerk and the white-collar world that had eluded his father. It was Way who would also provide for his legal training and a bar examination tutelage which would elevate him further from the streets of Andrew Square.

A native of Jim Curley's Roxbury, William Way had moved to Plymouth but kept a Boston office. During the seven years of John McCormack's apprenticeship, Way sought a legislative seat in the House of Representatives of the Massachusetts Great and General Court. He ran unsuccessfully four times in five years. He ran in his Plymouth district three times for the Massachusetts House in 1910, 1913, and 1914.[8] In 1912, he sought a Plymouth County Senate seat hoping that the civil war within the Republican Party between the Taft regulars and Teddy Roosevelt Progressives would open a place for him. However, he lost all four contests. He came close twice, but by 1914, his vote total fell to 30% and it was clear to him that the electoral route would remain forever closed.

William Way was a political anomaly. He ran from Republican-dominated Plymouth County as a Democrat. That provided little electoral help. He was also a practicing Unitarian, the Boston-based Protestant faith which many Christians felt bordered on heresy. Known as "the Boston religion," Unitarianism's major belief was that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, but simply His greatest prophet. As for the Holy Ghost, no such entity existed. By eliminating the Trinity and believing in the Unity of God alone, the Unitarians were at great variance from all Roman Catholics and most fellow Protestants. As some wry observers contended, Unitarianism was based on three beliefs, "The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Man, and the neighborhood of Boston." Way's Unitarianism was his political liability to the Irish Catholic voters in Plymouth County and his Democratic Party affiliation made him unpalatable to fellow Protestants who voted Republican in Yankee Plymouth. Put simply, William Way did not have "the right stuff" for political advancement. John McCormack learned a major lesson and his reinvented life story contained all the "right stuff"—an Irish father, a widowed mother, and younger siblings.