

THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER
THE IMMORTAL IRISHMAN¹
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I. Introduction.

Meagher's statue. Last summer, my wife Kathy and I went to Butte for a high school class reunion. We also took a side trip to Helena. While we were there, we stopped at the Montana state capitol to see the historic equestrian statue of Thomas Francis Meagher.³

The statue was unveiled before a large crowd on July 4, 1905.⁴ It was paid for by the Thomas Francis Meagher Memorial Association, a group of Butte and Anaconda Irishmen.⁵ That association was formed to counter the previously formed, anti-Catholic, American Protective Association after an 1894 election that located Montana's capitol in Helena, which William Clark supported, rather than in Anaconda, Marcus Daly's home town.⁶

Marcus Daly, one of Butte's copper kings, was the Thomas Francis Meagher Memorial Association's honorary chairman.⁷ Daly also was an Irish immigrant who supported numerous Irish causes. As one of the Anaconda Company's owners and manager of its Montana mining operations, he employed thousands of Irish miners and related tradesmen. He amassed a tremendous fortune from the entire operation before he died in New York City in 1900.⁸

According to David M. Emmons, a history professor emeritus at the University of Montana who's written *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town*⁹, the Irish "intended to put [the statue] in front of Clark's Capitol in Helena—that was their raised middle digit to Clark." Emmons has also stated that although the Irish said the statue was created so that Clark and the American Protective Association could "salute Meagher's glorious memory" every time they entered the Capitol, "what they were really saying was they could kiss his Irish ass."¹⁰

Who was Thomas Francis Meagher? Meagher was appointed as Montana's territorial secretary by President Andrew Johnson in 1865. He served as acting territorial governor from 1865 until his death in 1867. Immediately upon Meagher's arrival, then-governor Sidney Edgerton and his family fled the territory to take his daughter east to school, without President Johnson's knowledge or permission.¹¹ Meagher was a remarkable character. His life provides a striking narrative.

Meagher's importance as an historical figure has been widely recognized. Another Meagher equestrian statue stands in Waterford, Ireland, his hometown.¹² Because Meagher had no grave, a commemorative cenotaph marker in his memory issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs was installed in Green-Wood cemetery in Brooklyn, New York in 2008, near his widow's grave.¹³ A bronze bust of Meagher was also unveiled there in 2017.¹⁴ Another Meagher bust was placed on the Missouri river bank at Fort Benton in 2009, near the site of his mysterious death.¹⁵

A full-sized Meagher statue stands outside the New York-New York Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.¹⁶ He's also one of the Irishmen honored in the Nine Fine Irishmen pub located there.¹⁷ Hugh

Craig reports that the Las Vegas pub has an animated figure of Meagher giving his famous “Dock” speech,¹⁸ which I’ll discuss later. There’s also an Irish pub named the “Thomas Meagher Bar” in downtown Missoula.¹⁹ Meagher County, Montana was formed and named for him in 1867. White Sulphur Springs is its county seat.²⁰

Meagher began his career as an Irish nationalist leader and advocate. As the result, he was convicted of sedition by the British government in 1849 and sentenced to death by hanging. However, he received royal clemency from Queen Victoria at the last moment. He instead was “transported” to the Tasmanian penal colony in Australia to serve a life sentence, without any possibility of escaping or returning to Ireland.

Meagher escaped from Tasmania in 1852, despite having previously agreed not to do so. He eventually reached New York City. He there became a lawyer and a prominent speaker for Irish rights. After the Civil War broke out, he urged northern Irish to support the Union. He became brigadier general of the Irish Brigade during the Civil War, fighting many battles for the Union.²¹

Meagher also envisioned creating a new home for the Irish people in the Montana Territory, similar to what Brigham Young had done for Mormons in Utah. He instead developed a contentious, unsuccessful political relationship with the Montana Vigilantes, led by Wilbur F. Sanders. Meagher’s death cut his Irish ambitions short. On July 1, 1867, he jumped, fell or was pushed off a river boat at Fort Benton, and was swept down the Missouri River. His body was never recovered. No one ever was held legally responsible for his death.²² He was then only 43 years old.

Timothy Egan. This paper is based on Timothy Egan’s recent Meagher biography, *The Immortal Irishman*.²³ Egan also has written a number of other books, including *The Big Burn*,²⁴ describing the huge 1910 Idaho-Montana forest fire; and *The Worst Hard Time*,²⁵ describing the American dust bowl that existed during the 1920s and 1930s. Hollywood actor and producer John Cusack has announced that he is shooting a major film on Meagher’s life, based on Egan’s book.²⁶

I accidentally discovered the Meagher book at an airport newsstand last year. It’s a well-written story of Meagher’s life and death, and an excellent description of the places and times in which he lived. It covers his life’s four major periods: Ireland, Australia, the United States generally, and Montana. I’ll follow that outline here. The numbers in parentheses refer to the book’s pages.

II. To Be Irish in England.

Ireland’s History With England. Meagher was born on August 3, 1823, in Waterford, Ireland. To understand his life and times, it’s first necessary to review the prior history of Ireland’s relationship with England.

Waterford was founded by Vikings in 914. However, it was conquered by English King Henry II in 1171 (4-6). Irish native chieftains and family leaders initially were permitted to keep their estates. Over time, the English imprint on the land faded and the occupying English soldiers went “native” (6).

As the result, starting in 1367, the Statutes of Kilkenny outlawed Irish assimilation, and criminalized Irish dress, hairstyle and sport. Speaking Gaelic or using Irish place names could result

in forfeiture of land and property to the king. However, those laws proved to be extremely difficult to enforce. The Irish language was banished but never killed (6-7).

Led by Silken Thomas Fitzgerald, the Irish launched a revolt in 1534. Fitzgerald's forces marched on the English "Pale" clustered around Dublin, which was an urban fortress. The Pale referred to a staked area that by the late 1400s covered four counties. It enclosed an Anglo-Norman kingdom with armed security, a structured feudal system, and a sense of settled superiority. Beyond the Pale, an unruly Ireland lived on its own terms (7).

The English successfully resisted the Irish attack, with the aid of an invading army and then newly-invented cannon. Fitzgerald was hanged and then beheaded. An English army garrison remained in Dublin for nearly four centuries (7).

England then launched a second major wave of suppression. Henry VIII forced the Church of England on the country, seizing monasteries and forcing priests underground. Irish Catholics were ordered to become Anglicans or forfeit their land. Large estates, held by Irish families for centuries, were confiscated. Owners, their servants and tenants were kicked off the land and left to starve. Villages were ransacked and burned, leaving hungry children to flee with their mothers (8).

The English brought in Protestant settlers, many from Scotland, to replace the Irish families they had displaced. Despite continuing rebellions, by 1602 England controlled nearly all of Ireland. Foreign rule was buttressed by foreign religion. Both were held in place by a foreign army (8-9).

The Irish rebelled again in 1641, siding with King Charles I in the English civil war. They killed innocents and tyrants alike, massacring many Protestants, particularly in northern Ireland. In response, the English parliament called for Catholic Ireland to be destroyed once and for all. A new law declared, "No quarter shall be given to any Irishmen, or Papist born in Ireland" (8-9).

Exterminations by the English on a mass scale were carried out over the next ten years. For example, in 1649 Oliver Cromwell and an army of 12,000 men butchered nearly 4,000 people, including women and children, after breaching the walls in the fortified town of Drogheda, north of Dublin. The 30 people who survived were sold as slaves to Barbados. Although Cromwell was only in Ireland for nine months, he left a name for cruelty lasting 300 years (9).

The 1641 Irish rebellion also failed. As the result, Cromwell's soldiers seized more than half the good land in the country, about 8 million acres. Landowners who opposed Cromwell were arrested, sentenced to a life of bondage, and their lands were confiscated. Nearly 40,000 Irish were deported to the West Indies as slaves on sugar plantations (10).

Penal laws also were enacted at the end of the 17th century that criminalized the Catholic faith. They also made it illegal for Catholics to own a home, to live in major cities, to pass property on to their heirs, to be educated, to be citizens, or to have the right to vote. Priests could not teach school. Catholic assembly was outlawed. Those laws were enforced by an occupying army of at least 15,000 men and by schools of informants (10-11).

English efforts to destroy the Irish Catholic faith failed. However, they succeeded in displacing people from the land. Sons and grandsons of Cromwell's soldiers passed the fields they

had taken on to their heirs. Ireland became a nation of tenant farmers, paying rent to live on ground once owned by their ancestors (12).

Basque fishermen from Spain introduced the potato to Ireland in the late 1500s.²⁷ By the late 18th century, it was the Irish national food. More than 2,000,000 acres were cultivated. Small potato farms were worked by peasants, many of whom lived in one-room, windowless hovels (12-13).

The large estates were given over to grazing for cattle and sheep, and to growing money crops of oats and barley, which mostly went to England. The estates' landlords were gone much of the year. Gustave de Beaumont, a French journalist who toured Ireland in 1835 and 1837, called it "the very extreme of human wretchedness" and "an entire nation of paupers" (12-13).

The Irish parliament excluded 80 percent of Ireland's residents. However, it gave the illusion of self-government for Anglo and protestant gentry. In 1801, it was abolished and shuttered through an Act of Union. Its members were efficiently bribed to dissolve themselves. In exchange, Ireland was offered seats in the British parliament. However, Irish couldn't vote for those members unless they were wealthy and took an oath to the Crown's religion. The number of eligible voters in Waterford, with 28,000 people, fell to barely 700. Although Ireland's population was then nearly half of England's, it had only 15% of the votes in the House of Commons (21).

Family. Thomas Meagher, Sr., Meagher's grandfather, had left a tenant farm in County Tipperary, Ireland during the 1780s to sail to Newfoundland. Newfoundland was England's oldest colony. But it offered Irish a degree of respect not found at home. Meagher, Sr. bought a 60-ton brig, the first of his fleet. He shipped salted cod to Waterford and returned with bacon, flour, oats and immigrants. He later expanded his trade to include other commodities as well. He then brought his son, Thomas Meagher, Jr., into the business as a full partner in 1815 (13).

Meagher, Sr. eventually returned to Ireland with a 20,000-pound fortune. He and his son bought a mansion on the Waterford waterfront, and eventually took over half the waterfront. They were Irish aristocracy (14).

Education. Meagher was taught to love words and their power to change minds. He questioned his instructors at a Jesuit boarding school about why the Irish couldn't govern themselves or speak their own language. They and his father both responded that change would come to Ireland slowly, and by peaceful means. However, the English instead believed that Ireland should be governed "not by love but by fear" (14-15).

In 1839, Meagher was sent at age 16 to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, England, to receive an English education and complete his schooling. Stonyhurst was one of the best colleges in Europe. A series of reform acts allowed Catholics in England to acquire property, practice their own religion without fear of civil penalties, and attend their own schools. Meagher dominated the debate society. He also won a medal for an essay he wrote on the evils of American slavery (17-19).

Early political activity. Meagher finished school in 1843, at age 20, and returned home as the "Prince of Waterford." His father, Meagher, Jr., was then Waterford's mayor. Daniel O'Connell, the "Irish Liberator," had caused Parliament to pass the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, ending the last of the Penal Laws and thus permitting Meagher, Jr., as a Catholic, to become mayor. O'Connell then

moved on to attempting to repeal the Act of Union. Meagher gave his first political speech supporting that abolition in September 1843. O'Connell continued to draw large crowds supporting his 1843 "Year of Repeal," attracting a crowd of 300,000 in Waterford alone (23-26).

In response, British warships crowded into Dublin's harbor. Prime minister Robert Peel declared a proposed meeting at Contarf a criminal assembly, at which anyone attending could be arrested. O'Connell backed down and called off the protest. He was then arrested on a trumped-up charge. He was tried in January 1844 by a jury "packed with Protestants" and sentenced to a year in jail, a warning to anyone who would think of defying the British Empire in its backyard. Although he was released after less than a year, his health was ruined by the cold months in a cell (26-28).

Thomas Davis was a Protestant lawyer, an agitator and a poet. Meagher grew infatuated with this poet with power, memorizing Davis's best lines and repeating them in argument. He consumed everything Davis wrote. He also heard Davis speak. Meagher also heard William Smith O'Brien speak on behalf of Irish nationalism. Meagher offered his services to do anything to advance the cause. He was put to work laboring daily for repeal language for a parliamentary committee. He also sent poems to the *Nation*, Ireland's first national publication, edited by Charles Duffy (28-30).

Meagher also met another mystery poet, Jane Francesca Elgee, a Protestant from a family of staunch loyalists. She had cast off her past and reinvented herself as a distant descendant of Dante, a poet named Speranza. She also wrote poetry for the *Nation*. She was strongly attracted to Meagher's voice, his wit, the way he carried himself for one so young (31).

The potato famine. The Irish potato famine began in September 1845. Spores from diseased potatoes had come across the Atlantic, causing Ireland's potatoes to rot. The sole source of Ireland's food had collapsed. About this same time, Davis died of cholera. Without introduction, Meagher gave a speech in Davis's memory at a memorial held in Conciliation Hall, his first speech in the most prominent venue for Irish ideas (34).

During 1845-46, Meagher did more speaking, picking up where Davis left off. He quickly gained a following, packing Conciliation Hall. His speeches were printed in the *Nation*, sometimes word for word. Meagher challenged O'Connell's gradual progress toward repealing the Act of Union. The Dublin crowd began calling him the "Young Tribune." O'Connell cautioned Meagher that Young Irelandism, a more radical nationalist movement, would lead him into danger (34-36).

The fast-developing potato famine motivated Meagher's fury. Throughout the winter and spring of 1846, thousands of people dropped dead of starvation. Crops had also failed in England, Holland, and in parts of France and Germany. But only in Ireland were people dying en masse. Despite this fact, there was plenty of food in Ireland. About three-fourths of the country's cultivable land was in corn, wheat, oats and barley. About 1.5 billion pounds of grain and other foodstuffs were exported. The same was true with respect to cattle, sheep and hogs. Ireland exported more beef than any other part of the British Empire (36-37).

The new 1846 growing season provided a chance to start clean with a crop that hadn't been contaminated. However, the blight reappeared, ruining nearly all of the potatoes grown in Ireland. Yet Ireland grew more food than Ireland could consume, most of it bound for export. To the Young Ireland leaders, the solution was to shut down the ports and feed Irish-grown food to the dying. The

Nation demanded that as well. By September 1846, Irish potato farmers had no money to pay their rents. They were evicted by soldiers from their huts, which were then burned and destroyed (37-39).

Political debate. William Smith O'Brien argued in Parliament that England could not simply sit and watch this disaster. Ireland then had no government of its own. It therefore was dependent on England's will and whim. O'Brien refused to attend any official business until Parliament acted. He was arrested and confined to a cell for three weeks. Meagher and O'Brien, joined by the *Nation*, argued that the Irish ports should be shut. Exporters should be paid to keep the food in Ireland. At the least, relief should be provided. However, the British ruling class instead believed in free markets. To interfere would upset the natural economic order (39-40).

There was even debate that relief sent from America should not be allowed, since it also interfered with the free market. The British allowed the relief ships to dock, but the Irish had to pay for the food. Charles Trevelyan, who was given the task of doing something about Irish starvation, stated that it was "no part of the functions of government to provide supplies of food" (40-41).

When donor corn was too hard for the stomachs of the hungry and the Irish had no money to pay, Trevelyan shut down the food depots, stating, "The only way to prevent the people from becoming habitually dependent is to bring the relief operations to a close." He was cheered by many in the English press. However, riots then broke out. Shots were sprayed into protestors in Waterford, who had begged and then threatened merchants who exported grain. Refugees poured into the cities, quivering beggars carrying all their possessions in a bundle, into workhouses thrown together by the Crown. Many refugees died soon after being admitted (41).

Not all of Britain was that cold-hearted. Quakers from London offered their services. Randolph Routh, chairman of the Relief Commission, took issue with Trevelyan, blaming the English landlords, not the character flaw or Irish peasants. Irish population had grown by 70 percent during the past few decades. Trevelyan thought that the famine was a "culling," nature at work. He wrote in private that it was God's answer to Ireland's overpopulation. "The cure has been applied by the direct stroke of an all-wise Providence" (41-43).

Political reactions. John Mitchel, a fire-breathing lawyer and "unabashed nationalist," succeeded Davis as an editor of the *Nationalist*. Mitchel wrote biting, sarcastic articles about England's responsibility for the famine. Although Mitchel wasn't initially impressed with Meagher, they developed a deepening friendship. Mitchel was a writer, Meagher a speaker. During the summer of 1846, Meagher sharpened his attacks on the inaction of O'Connell's organization in achieving Irish independence (44).

In 1846, the Tory government fell to the Whigs in the English Parliament. O'Connell had supported Lord John Russell, the new Whig prime minister. However, British policy toward the Irish didn't change. Russell made clear they would get no further food relief unless they paid for it (45).

Britain tightens down. British authorities passed a law preventing a head of household from getting food relief if he held a quarter acre or more and had refused to give it up to the landlord. Doing so increased the numbers of dispossessed, homeless and hungry. England's policy was thus to let food flow freely out of Ireland, to arrest and jail those who spoke for the famished, to make it more difficult for peasants to stay on the land, and to restock the army barricades (46).

Duffy and O'Brien were both arrested for free speech. Meagher continued to argue the Irish case. At a July 28, 1846 meeting at Conciliation Hall, his famous "Sword" speech argued that force might be necessary to achieve Irish independence, as had occurred in the United States.

Meagher proclaimed, "The man who will listen to reason, let him be reasoned with. But it is the weaponed hand of the patriot that can alone prevail against battalioned despotism. . . . Abhor the sword? Stigmatize the sword? No, my lord, for at its blow a giant nation started from the waters of the Atlantic, and by its redeeming magic, and in the quiver of its crimson light, the crippled colony sprang into the attitude of a proud republic—prosperous, limitless and invincible"²⁸ (47).

The crowd was on its feet. Meagher had clearly won the day. His argument and the crowd's enthusiastic support divorced him from O'Connell's Repeal organization. As the result, O'Connell's day was done and his organization was broken (47-48).

In the spring of 1847, the British tried using soup kitchens to supplement their work houses. However, that all-liquid diet failed to provide sufficient nutrients to keep many people alive. Russell also sent more troops to assist in increasing forcible evictions of peasants. He announced that food would continue to flow out of Irish ports, with no interference of free trade. *Laissez faire* continued to guide British policy. At the end of summer 1847, Russell closed the soup kitchens. Meagher became the public voice of opposition. His "Sword" speech made him famous. Copies were printed and circulated throughout Ireland (51-52).

The famine worsens. As the famine worsened, the Irish began to die of typhus. Peasants also began storing weapons and sharpening pikes, and killing their landlords with their own weapons. The Earl of Clarendon, Ireland's chief overseer, reported that "Distress, discontent and hatred of English rule are increasing everywhere." He also reported that a great social revolution was going on in Ireland, and that Ireland had been sacrificed to British economic policy. "No distress (famine) would have occurred if the exportation of Irish grain had been prohibited" (54-55).

O'Connell died on May 16, 1847, in Italy. In mourning, his supporters assaulted Meagher and Mitchel, and vandalized the *Nation's* office. Meagher toured the countryside, recruiting for the Irish Confederation movement. He attracted enormous crowds. Ireland also began to empty out. Nearly 250,000 people emigrated in 1847. By the end of that year, 400,000 people had died (55-57).

Revolution. On March 15, 1848, an immense crowd squeezed into the Music Hall to discuss a possible revolution. O'Brien then argued that everyone must be engaged in the struggle. Meagher followed up with some added militancy. In response, Clarendon dispatched troops throughout Dublin. It was fully occupied and under heavy guard. The Royal Navy redirected ships from the Portugese coast to Ireland. Less than a week after the Music Hall event, O'Brien, Meagher and Mitchel were all arrested, but were soon out on bond. They were acquitted by a hung jury (59-62).

The Treason Felony Act. Parliament then rushed through a Treason Felony Act, which essentially made being an Irish nationalist a crime. Any slight against the Crown or the British government in Ireland was considered grounds for a hard felony punishable by "transportation"—shipping out of the country to one of the Empire's distant colonies. Mitchel was the law's first victim. He was arrested on May 13, 1848, and convicted by a jury of Protestants. He was sentenced to transportation to the West Indies for 14 years and immediately carried off in chains (62-63).

By now, Meagher's father was a member of Parliament. Meagher refused to accept his father's pleas to call off his involvement in the revolution. Meagher was arrested for seditious language during a speech at Rathkeale, but again released on bond. He spoke to a crowd of 50,000 people at Mount Slieveenamon, then went back to his father's home in Waterford. He left on July 20, 1848, to start the revolution in Kilkenny (65-67).

Habeas corpus suspended. On July 22, 1848, the British suspended habeas corpus immediately and placed Ireland under martial law. Accordingly, anyone could be held indefinitely without cause, bail, or being told what they were held for. Duffy was arrested again. British troops stormed the *Nation's* offices, seizing all copies, and grabbing the press, type and manuscripts (68-69).

Young Ireland leaders convicted. Meagher and a friend, John Blake Dillon, a *Nation* journalist, met with O'Brien in Kilkenny. They decided to pursue an insurrection rather than to turn themselves in or to flee Ireland. O'Brien was arrested by police after leading a small band of rebels at Ballinacorney (69).

Meagher refused to leave Ireland. He and two other Young Ireland leaders were arrested and charged with high treason, which carried a death penalty. Duffy, Dillon and O'Brien all were convicted and sentenced to death (76).

Meagher was tried last and also was convicted. Just before sentence was passed, he gave his famous "Dock" speech, stating in part: "I am here to speak the truth whatever it may cost. I am here to regret nothing I have ever done, to retract nothing I have ever said. . . To lift this island up, to make her a benefactor to humanity instead of being the meanest beggar in the world . . . This has been my ambition, and this ambition has been my crime. Judged by the law of England, I know this crime entails the penalty of death, but the history of Ireland explains this crime, and justifies it. Judged by that history, I am no criminal"²⁹ (77).

Meagher's speech was received with "deafening applause." However, the judges weren't moved. They immediately sentenced him to be hanged by the neck until dead, then beheaded and quartered (77-78).

The global Irish community immediately called on the British government to spare the lives of the political prisoners. Meagher's celebrity continued to grow while he was in jail. To avoid a plot to rescue the prisoners, they were taken to Dublin. In late spring 1849, the prisoners' appeals were denied. However, Queen Victoria commuted their sentences to transportation for life to the island of Tasmania, off the coast of Australia (78-81).

III. To Be Irish in the Penal Colony.

Landing in Australia. By 1849, Britain had sent almost 40,000 convicts to the Australia penal colony. A fourth of them were women. About one percent were political prisoners. Between 1845 and 1855, about 1.8 million Irish also sailed across the Atlantic as part of a Great Exodus from the Great Famine. About 1.5 million emigrated to the United States. The rest went to Canada. In 1847 alone, 17,000 died in the Atlantic crossing. The bodies of the dead were buried at sea (87).

Meagher's ship arrived in Hobart Town on October 29, 1849. The rest of Australia was then trying to phase out its prisons and to become a functioning civilization with a decent reputation. However, that wasn't true in the Van Diemen's Land island (now Tasmania). It had 30,000 convicts out of a 65,000 total population, the worst offenders. Many convicts were unprincipled and depraved. They were frequently "assigned" to work for farmers as slave labor. The hardened and most hopeless among them were housed in caged compounds (90-91).

Governor Denison saw no reason to treat the Irish political prisoners any differently from the other prisoners. However, Lord Grey, the secretary of state for the colonies, was under pressure from progressives at home and influential Irish abroad. He decided that the Young Ireland felons would be given a fair degree of freedom, to avoid having them become martyrs. Governor Denison was instructed to offer the prisoners a choice: they could either be held under guard or be free to build a life on the island, so long as they gave their word as gentlemen never to escape (92).

Everyone but O'Brien chose the latter. He was placed in solitary confinement in a cabin on a small island in the Tasman Sea. Meagher thought an escape was "out of the question." (92-94). After exploring the island, Meagher put his energies into his new home, a cottage on Dog's Head Peninsula at Lake Sorell, an empty lake seven miles by eight. He had days of lonely pleasure on the lake in his boat, *Speranza* (99).

Efforts were made to help O'Brien escape, since he might not live long in solitary confinement. Meagher helped fund that effort with money borrowed from his father. However, O'Brien was captured, then removed to the Port Arthur convict station, a broken man with his will to resist gone. His ordeal was a warning that escape from the island was futile (99-101).

Mitchel arrived in Hobart nearly a year after his ship left Bermuda. He was in poor health, but had been informed he could bring his wife and three sons to live with him. He, Meagher and two other Young Irelanders held a reunion at Meagher's cottage. When Gov. Denison heard of the reunion, he was furious. He took away the prisoners' limited freedom (not including Meagher), and sentenced them to three months strenuous labor during the peak of the Australian summer (105-08).

Catherine Bennett. One day Meagher came upon an 18-year-old beauty, Catherine "Bennie" Bennett. She was governess for Dr. Edwin Hall's children. Although her father had been convicted of robbing a mail coach on the open road in Ireland (a "highwayman") and transported to Tasmania more than 20 years before, she was a free citizen (102-04). During the last months of 1850, Meagher courted her intensely, despite his friends' concerns that she was beneath his standing. Around Christmas, he proposed. They were married on February 22, 1851 at Dr. Hall's home (110-12).

Meagher initially seemed to be a happy country squire living with Bennie at their Lake Sorell cottage. However, as the initial bliss dissipated, he grew tired of being in prison, of his routine, of reporting each week to the magistrate, and of being on the wrong side of a small town's gossip. He began writing letters on behalf of a self-governing Tasmania, and to end its prison system (114).

At an election, those who wanted to end the penal colony routed Dennison's loyalists and took control of the new legislative council. The council soon called for the end of transportation. Denison was appalled that the political pot was being stirred and that a constitution for the newly democratic state was being written by Irish rebels who were his prisoners (112-15).

Escape. Meagher increasingly wanted to escape. But Bennie was pregnant. They therefore decided that he would escape first, then have her and their child leave later. Their plan was that she would live with Meagher's father in Waterford, then reunite with him in America. Meagher returned Bennie to her family home. On January 3, 1852, he sent a note to his district magistrate advising that he no longer agreed not to escape. The magistrate immediately sent a heavily armed patrol to Lake Sorell. When they arrived, Meagher revealed himself to the patrol, then galloped away (116-18).

Meagher had made arrangements over months to travel by horseback across Tasmania and by fishing boat to Waterhouse Island, then to catch a ship to take him to freedom. The fishermen waited on the island's beach with him for two days, but rowed away and left Meagher there alone when they ran out of food. After ten days on the island, the ship arrived. It was carrying wool from Australia to England by way of South America (120-27).

By escaping, Meagher was transformed from a prisoner to one of the best known fugitives. "His calling would be to translate a history of famine and oppression, exile and humiliation, into a life of possibility in a country founded on the opposite principles of the penal colony" (127).

IV. To Be Irish in America.

Meagher's arrival. Meagher arrived in New York City by changing ships in South America. Without his knowledge, his son had died after a few months while Meagher was still at sea (139). The *Boston Pilot* had reported that Meagher was free, and that "In him, the Irish will find a chief to unite and guide them." Between 1847 and 1853, about 1.8 million immigrants had landed in New York City, of whom 848,000 were Irish. Some dispersed to other eastern cities or other parts of the country. However, most lived in lower Manhattan, rarely wandering north of 14th Street (134).

Word spread that Meagher had reached American soil. During his second night in New York, Irish-American soldiers, the Brooklyn Coronet Band, and a crowd of more than 7,000 people serenaded and cheered him, and fired their guns into the air. The Irish looked on him as a hero, perhaps a savior (137-38).

Within weeks, Meagher clubs were formed in many cities. Speaking invitations poured in. Numerous dignitaries, including president Millard Fillmore, insisted that they be allowed to pay tribute to him (138). The New York Common Council honored him at the Astor House. Meagher told it that he was grateful to New Yorkers, but simply wanted a "quiet sanctuary." However, the Famine Irish in America clearly wanted him to lead them. Meagher wasn't yet an American citizen. He therefore quickly took an oath of intent to become an American (139-41).

The "Know-Nothings." The "Know-Nothings" had grown out of the American Nativist Party, which was violently anti-Catholic. They began attacking Irish churches and neighborhoods during summer 1844. That fall, they elected mayors in Philadelphia and New York. During the 1850s, they joined forces with the temperance movement, and pushed for prohibition of alcohol, restricted immigration, and no citizenship for the masses in the tenements. They also went directly after Meagher, planting newspaper stories about his allegedly bad character and career. Their goal was to prevent a leader from emerging from the New York Irish (142-43).

Celebrity. Meagher followed a hurried route to citizenship before the Know-Nothings could close the way. He also considered studying for the bar and joining a New York law firm with friends of his from Ireland. However, public speaking paid much better than practicing law. In fall 1852, Meagher was paid \$1,650 for his first lecture, on the Australian penal colony. He then toured on a speaking circuit for a year and became a sought-after celebrity. His wife Bennie received a similar welcome when she arrived in Waterford in June 1853. More than 20,000 people turned out to greet her. She and Meagher's father then sailed together for America in July 1853 (143-44).

Bennie's death. Bennie didn't feel connected to Meagher's new life. He was an extrovert, she enjoyed solitude. New York's heat, noise, filth and crowds made her ill. She also wasn't interested in joining Meagher on lecture invitations out west in the fall. She instead became pregnant, then went back to Ireland with Meagher's father. She died in childbirth in Waterford on May 9, 1854 at age 22. Although Meagher's son survived, Meagher was unable to see him there (145-46).

Elizabeth Townsend. Meagher met Elizabeth Townsend later in 1854. She was a Fifth Avenue daughter of American royalty. Her great-grandfather had amassed a 23,000-acre tract of land straddling the New York-New Jersey colonies in the mid-1700s. He and his descendants built an empire of iron as the United States grew. Elizabeth's father was no fan of Meagher or the Irish. The family was Presbyterian and politically conservative (153-55).

Meagher proposed to Elizabeth on January 2, 1855, although he knew her family would never accept him. She accepted his proposal, even though her father disapproved. They married on November 14, 1855 at an archbishop's residence. She traveled to Ireland on her own, and met Meagher's father and son. Meagher then studied for and passed the bar examination. He specialized in criminal law. He also became a United States citizen on his own, not by marriage, before the Know-Nothings could prevent him from doing so (155-58).

Slavery. The slavery issue became increasingly violent and controversial during the mid-1850s. In 1857, the Supreme Court held in its *Dred Scott* decision that blacks, free or chained, could never be citizens. Its reasoning was that blacks had always been considered property. Accordingly, the Declaration of Independence's statement that "all men are created equal" did not cover them. That decision caused Abraham Lincoln to run for the Senate in 1858. Although he lost that race, he became the moral voice of the new Republican party (161).

Meagher couldn't avoid the issue. He was asked about slavery everywhere he spoke. Meagher initially believed that America couldn't get rid of slavery, and that it should confine its efforts to alleviating the evils that accompany it. Although Meagher was "devoted to the Union, the Union accepts slavery." This was the position of the Democratic party and James Buchanan, its standard bearer, in the 1856 presidential election (161-62).

The Irish News. In 1856, Meagher started a newspaper, the *Irish News*, to give the Irish a voice. It quickly gained a circulation of more than 50,000. The paper urged the Irish to leave New York's lethal slums and go west to take advantage of the open countryside. Meagher's speeches also continued to draw huge crowds. He tried to keep alive the memory of the million who died in the Great Hunger. But he did not speak out on slavery (164-65).

Colonel Corcoran. Questions of hatred of the English and loyalty to the United States dogged the Irish in America, with Meagher in the middle of it. For example, in 1860, Colonel Michael Corcoran, an Irish-American who commanded the 69th Regiment of the New York state militia, refused to parade his Irish-American volunteers before the Prince of Wales. He was arrested, thrown in jail and ordered to face a court-martial. His stand caused a national furor. Influential voices called for Corcoran to be deported (167).

Meagher rushed to Corcoran's defense. He argued that Corcoran had not refused a military order in time of battle. He simply did not have his men show up for a parade for a foreign royal. However, a view of the Irish hardened in many places that they could not be counted upon to hold firm against a renegade South or be trusted in the uniform of their adopted country (167-68).

Costa Rica. In 1860, Meagher sold his newspaper and spent a year in Central America with Libby. In Costa Rica, he worked on a railroad right-of-way survey across the isthmus. However, the deal fell through, snagged by doubters in Congress and obstructionists in Costa Rica. Meagher became depressed, thinking he was simply an oratorical ornament who had lost his luster (168).

Secession. The Meaghers returned home in January 1861 after a year's absence in Central America. Lincoln was elected president in the 1860 election. He did not promise to abolish slavery. He won with just under 40 percent of the vote. He was not even on the ballot in nine southern states. He lost New York City by a substantial margin. The Irish voted Northern Democrat. They had been warned that if the Republicans won, they'd have to compete with the labor of four million emancipated Negroes (170). After the election, New York's mayor suggested that it secede, not with the South, but to form an independent city republic open for business, loyal to neither North nor South (170-71).

By March 1, 1861, more than half the South had deserted the Union—seven states with slaves making up 47 percent of their population. Lincoln's March 4, 1861 inaugural address stated that he had no intention of interfering with the institution of slavery in states where it existed. "I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." He also appealed to the runaway states to come home. However, the Confederate States of America's founding convention embraced slavery in Article I of its constitution. Its leaders also strongly supported slavery as a "natural and normal condition" for blacks (170-71).

Meagher continued to respect the South's sovereign right to slavery so long it was the law of the land, but not to leave the Union. The South exploited the argument that the Irish should not fight for those who hated them, particularly since about 80,000 Irish immigrants lived in the breakaway states (171).

The Civil War begins. On April 12, 1861, the Confederates attacked Fort Sumter, located in Charleston Harbor. The disloyalty charge against Colonel Corcoran was immediately dropped. Corcoran volunteered his regiment in response to Lincoln's call for 75,000 men from state militias to serve for 90 days, primarily to defend Washington, D.C., against possible Southern attack, but also to make a quick, preemptive strike against Richmond, VA, the South's capital city. Meagher joined his friend. He gave speeches supporting a fight for America, with promise of an eventual fight for Ireland, using a battle-seasoned force to sail across the Atlantic. He argued that it was the Irish responsibility to prevent America from falling apart (171-75).

Meagher also decided to lead his own unit of Irish Zouaves. He advertised for 100 young Irishmen. He was immediately overwhelmed by volunteers. Meagher began drilling them in Hibernian Hall, in the parks and on the streets. Their muskets were musty and primitive, and they knew nothing of tactics, artillery logistics, or treating the wounded. What carried them into battle was their zest to fight, to belong to a country that had often mistreated them, and the desire to prove their worth (175-76).

At Fort Corcoran, the Union Irish were placed under the command of Gen. Irvin McDowell, who had a 35,000-man army and diminishing time in which to use them. Gen. William T. Sherman joined McDowell. He had no patience for Irish jollyng. He treated them like farm animals. Meagher developed a distinct distaste for his commander. According to Meagher, Sherman was “a rude and envenomed martinet” (178-79).

Bull Run. Orders to move finally came on July 16, 1861. Meagher and Corcoran rode at the head of their troops. They were to attack a rail junction, then topple the capital at Richmond, VA. They participated in the Battle of Bull Run, which resulted in a full-scale Union retreat. Meagher and his troops unsuccessfully tried to hold the line. They were among the last of the Union soldiers to retreat. Thirty-eight Irishmen from the 69th died at Bull Run, another 59 were seriously hurt, and nearly 200 were missing. The Union had been humiliated (179-85).

The next day, Meagher and his troops prepared to go back to New York, since their enlistments had expired. However, Sherman refused to permit them to do so. He threatened to shoot Meagher if his troops attempted to leave without orders. That afternoon, President Lincoln visited Meagher’s troops, offering encouragement. The men gave him a Gaelic cheer. The 69th was mustered out of duty a few days later, free to return home as Meagher had requested (186-88).

Meagher takes the lead. Meagher then learned that Corcoran had been captured and was being held in solitary confinement in a damp, lightless cell in Charleston. Someone had to lead the Irish. Meagher refused offers to become a captain in the regular army or an aide-de-camp to General John C. Fremont. Instead, an idea was floated to outfit an all-Irish brigade of at least four regiments, with its own flag, pipe and drum corps, priests, surgeons and poet laureate (190).

On August 19, 1861, the largest rally of Irish yet on the continent, 60,000 people, was held at Jones’s Wood in New York as a benefit for the widows and families of those killed at Bull Run. With Meagher’s forceful advocacy, the benefit became a recruitment drive for the Irish brigade. Meagher made more speeches during the following months, linking the Confederacy to England. Almost 80 percent of the cotton for that industry came from the slaveholding South. A speech in Boston led to commitments to fill two regiments of the Irish Brigade. Meagher’s wife also threw herself forcefully into her husband’s cause. Meagher soon recruited nearly 3,000 men (190-94).

Meagher becomes brigadier general. During the 1861-62 winter, Meagher’s regiment was stationed at Camp California, just outside Arlington, VA. It in turn was under the general command of General George B. McClelland. Meagher liked McClelland. McClelland treated the immigrants much better than Sherman ever did. Meagher commanded the regiment in all but title. His appointment as a brigadier general finally came through in February 1862. The army’s top brass dismissed him as a “political general,” one of Lincoln’s patronage plums designed to bring an ethnic

constituency to arms. Meagher's new command lifted the winter camp's gloom. As brigadier general, Meagher carried the hopes of the Irish in American on his gold-braided shoulders. (195-98).

Summer of slaughter. During spring 1862, Meagher's regiment had moved toward Richmond. However, it was still sitting in camp, waiting to go into combat. It was put to work cutting and stripping timber for corduroy roads heading north. Meagher organized Gaelic football matches and decided to stage a steeplechase. While it was occurring, the Confederates decided to attack the smaller half of McClelland's army on the other side of the Chickahominy River. Meagher's regiment rushed across the river plain to reinforce it (200-04).

On June 1, 1862, the regiment fought and prevailed in the Battle of Fair Oaks. The battle occurred four miles outside Richmond. It cost the Confederates 6,134 dead and wounded to the Union's 5,031. Meagher's regiment lost two officers and 39 soldiers. Its result was that the Confederates had failed to break the Northern army in two and left it at the doorstep of the rebel capital. McClelland personally complimented Meagher on how his troops had performed in battle. A day after the battle, Confederate president Jefferson Davis appointed Robert E. Lee as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia (204-07).

The next major battle in which Meagher's regiment was involved began on June 25, 1862. Lee sent 50,000 troops against 35,000 Union troops to drive the Northern army from the Virginia peninsula. The Confederates broke through the Union lines. Meagher's regiment went to support those battered forces. It was able to prevent a Union collapse without firing a shot. However, McClellan decided to retreat. Later major battles continued through July 1, 1862. The end result was that the Irish Brigade had been cut down by nearly a third in a week's time. The 69th regiment alone went from 750 to 295 men (208-12).

Recruiting. The Battle of Fair Oaks had made national heroes of Meagher and his immigrant warriors. However, Meagher begged to go home to see his wife. McClellan agreed to grant him a short leave of absence, but only to raise fresh recruits. He left during the second week of July for New York, to probe what was left of the Irish will to fight a war that was theirs by blood (213).

On July 25, 1862, Meagher spoke to an Irish crowd of 5,000 at a New York regimental armory. His purpose was to fill the empty ranks in Lincoln's army. The war was not going well. Many Irish saw no need to be killed fighting another country's battles. Archbishop Hughes had issued a declaration that Catholics had "not the slightest intention of carrying on a war that costs so much in blood and treasure just to justify a clique of abolitionists in the North." Despite Meagher's oratory, by the close of his leave only 250 new men had signed on for duty. To reconstitute itself, the Irish brigade needed new soldiers from other parts of the North (215-20).

Antietam and emancipation. In September 1862, General Lee advanced into Maryland, seeking to take Union ground and threaten Washington, D.C., forcing Lincoln to the bargaining table. The Confederates hoped to keep their slaves, call the war a draw and go home. The Irish Brigade fought Lee's advance at Antietam Creek, near Sharpsburg, Maryland. That battle included the single bloodiest day in American history, leaving about 5,000 dead and 22,717 in total casualties. The Irish Brigade was sliced in half, suffering 540 casualties in a single day. At the end, Lee was forced to retreat. However, McClellan did not continue to attack to push Lee across the Potomac and out of Maryland. If he had done so, perhaps McClellan then could have won the war (220-26).

Six days after the Antietam battle, Lincoln released his Emancipation Proclamation. It freed slaves held within any state in rebellion against the United States effective January 1, 1863. The proclamation was met with outrage from Democrats and fuming from leading Catholic clerics. Jefferson Davis said Lincoln had broken his inaugural promise. Still, it was now clear that the members of the Irish Brigade who had died at Antietam did so not for Ireland or to hold the nation together, but to free the black slaves of America (227).

The Emancipation Proclamation put Britain on the defensive. It could not now recognize the Confederacy. The Civil War was no longer simply about states' rights. England's neutrality also undercut Meagher's argument that Irish soldiers were also fighting England. Lincoln finally dismissed McClellan in November 1862, replacing him with General Ambrose Burnside. Some of the Irish Brigade deserted and were shot (231-33).

Fredericksburg. The brigade's next battle was at Fredericksburg, Maryland in December 1862. The Confederates were located on a hill behind a fortified wall. Burnside had an army of 110,000 men. Union troops made repeated, suicidal, unsuccessful attacks up an open hillside toward Marye's Heights. As the result, the Irish Brigade was shattered, losing half its men, its single bloodiest day. It was no longer in any condition to fight (234-43).

Meagher went back to New York to recruit more troops. However, Irish opinion had turned against the Union cause. He returned to the brigade's camp near Fredericksburg. General "Fighting Joe" Hooker had replaced Burnside. In early 1863, Meagher unsuccessfully sought to obtain a leave for the original three regiments he'd recruited. That request was ignored (244-48).

Meagher resigns. Meagher's last battle occurred in late April 1863 at Chancellorsville, VA. Hooker there lost about 18,000 men to 13,000 for the South. The Irish Brigade again suffered horrific losses. Meagher was finished. Five days after the battle ended, he tendered his resignation as commander of "what was once known as the Irish Brigade" in an angry and indignant resignation letter. Although he was willing to serve in any other capacity, he could no longer send Irishmen to their deaths. His resignation was accepted on May 14, 1863. Meagher then assembled his immigrant soldiers for a final farewell to arms (249-50).

In July 1863, riots in New York City occurred over the new draft law, in part over a provision that permitted anyone to buy their way out of the draft for \$300 or by providing a live substitute. The riots occurred over four days throughout the city. The death toll was close to 500. The Irish became the ethnic face of the riots. There was now a substantial question as to whose side they were on (251-55).

Meagher continues as a general and to support Lincoln. Meagher became evangelical in his opposition to slavery. He wrote both in Lincoln's defense and against slavery. As the result, there was great cost to his standing in the Irish community. He continued as a general in the Union army, without his Irish Brigade. In September 1864, he was sent to Tennessee to help guard the west end of a long, often-severed Union supply line stretching from Nashville to Atlanta. He also campaigned on Lincoln's behalf and against McClellan, his Democratic opponent. More than 75 percent of Union soldiers voted for Lincoln. However, he received just 33 percent of the vote in New York City (255-61).

During the war's final six months, Meagher was sustained by poetry and drink. He defended the ex-slaves who served in the Union army and came out publicly supporting their full rights. He turned a provisional army of convalescents into a formidable force. However, his army was ordered to travel to Pittsburgh and then overland to meet the bulk of the Union force as it advanced north through the Carolinas. Out of harm's way on the railroad, the army partied, drank, disobeyed orders, left without leave, slept late and harassed locals at train stops. Meagher was blamed. He was mustered out of the army in March 1865 (261-63).

V. New Ireland.

Secretary of the Montana Territory. Meagher intended to ask Lincoln for an appointment in one of the western territories. However, Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865. Meagher therefore left for Montana in July 1865 on his own. He initially worked with James L. Fisk, a professional emigrant who guided pilgrims to the promised land. However, while Meagher was in Minnesota, President Andrew Johnson instead appointed him secretary of the Montana Territory, its second-highest position. The territory then was only a year old, 143,776 square miles. Meagher thought he could urge the Irish in New York City build new lives in the West (268-71).

Meagher traveled by river and then overland by stagecoach to Bannack City, Montana Territory. His movements were heralded in newspapers as he proceeded. He arrived there in September 1865. However, Virginia City had just then been designated as Montana's territorial capital. Meagher was met by Governor Sidney Edgerton, a radical Republican and former territorial judge. Edgerton was dressed for travel and packed to go with his family (271-74).

Meagher learned about Bannack City Sheriff Henry Plummer, who had been taken from his cabin and hung without formal charges or a trial. The right-thinking people of Virginia City, the "Vigilance Committee," thought Plummer was stealing from coaches carrying gold dust. Within a month, 20 people had been killed after being targeted by the Vigilance Committee (274-76).

Edgerton introduced Meagher to his nephew, Wilbur Sanders, an attorney and the Vigilance Committee's leading voice and prosecutor. Sanders also was a Radical Republican. Since Meagher had broken with his party to support Lincoln, Sanders expected he would be a political fellow traveler. Sanders told Meagher that Montana's Democrats were all "rebels and traitors" who were "unfit to exercise the right of self-government" (276).

Acting territorial governor. Edgerton then told Meagher that he and his family were leaving Montana on the same stage that brought Meagher into town to take his daughter east to school. He was fleeing the Territory, without President Johnson's knowledge or permission. He would not return for 25 years. Edgerton's action left Meagher as acting territorial governor. Edgerton also told Meagher that no federal money was available to fund the territorial government (276-77).

Meagher then rode 75 miles east to the new capital of Virginia City. In the days before his arrival on September 28, 1865, the vigilantes had begun another killing spree. The executions were recorded in Thomas Dimsdale's *Montana Post*. Dimsdale welcomed Meagher to Virginia City. Meagher eventually settled into a 500-square-foot log cabin as the governor's mansion, formerly a butcher shop.³⁰ Irish miners, laborers and servants came out to meet the orator (277-78).

Governing. As the days became shorter, Virginia City became ever more claustrophobic. The town was isolated, pinned in by mountains and weather, without a telegraph connection or regular stagecoach. It had run out of food during the preceding winter. Meagher threw himself into governing, firing off letters and orders. He initially dutifully consulted with the right-thinking citizens, but then did so less frequently. The biggest question of the day in Montana was whether to convene a territorial legislature. Sanders urged Meagher not to do so, because it would be dominated by Democrats. Meagher initially agreed, then changed his mind. His doing so infuriated the right-thinkers (280-81).

Meagher soon became the enemy of the secret syndicate that had run Montana by terror. They started a smear campaign against him. In late November, Meagher and a party of five set out to visit Jesuit missions and Helena en route to Fort Benton on the Missouri. While he was traveling, the vigilantes issued a new round of death sentences. By the end of 1865, they had murdered 37 people in barely two years' time (281-83).

Meagher was proudly and loudly a Democrat, an affront to the Masonic Order, Protestants and nativists. He feared no man in the territory. He crossed the vigilantes by siding with Democrats—keeping the king's Bible out of public schools, convening a legislature, insisting on publicly owned roads and riverways. The vigilantes called him “the Acting One” and shunned him. They also seized and hung a man in Helena just after Meagher had issued a reprieve on his prison sentence for manslaughter. He was left hanging with his reprieve still in his pocket (285).

Indians. Meagher was an observer at a treaty session at Fort Benton led by Indian agent Gad Upson that was attended by more than 7,000 Indians. He quickly learned how homelands were broken up by the government. The Blackfeet and Piegan tribes were expected to relinquish all land south of the Missouri and Teton Rivers and east of the Milk River, the heart of the most bountiful bison country, to occupy a rectangle against what would become Glacier National Park (288-89).

In return, the bands would receive a \$5,000 annuity and each chief would be paid \$500 for twenty years. Many of the payments were in farm implements. The Blackfeet, who had been horsemen and hunters for generations, were expected to become ranchers and wheat growers. Some chieftains signed, others did not (289).

The Sioux refused to take the treaty bait. During the last half of 1865 and into 1866, they moved freely throughout large parts of Wyoming and Montana territories, attacking cavalymen, wagon trains and miners on their way to Virginia City. The government closed most of the Bozeman Trail, which cut north from the Oregon Trail. The attacks sent whites into a panic. Meagher asked for federal soldiers through General Sherman, who then was commander of the Department of the Missouri. Sherman still bore a grudge towards Meagher and refused his request (289-90).

The territorial legislature. Meagher called the legislature into session on March 5, 1866. Acting as a citizen government of populist Democrats, it passed 46 bills. Sanders was outraged at the Acting One for the crime of acting like a governor. On St. Patrick's Day, Meagher gave a major oration praising the Irish and urging them never to give up hope. Ireland and the United States would be “hand in hand, down the great road of time” on the side of “the freedomless, the beggared and the crushed” (291-93).

Libby joins Meagher. Libby joined Meagher on June 5, 1866, after 65 days on a steamboat up the Missouri from St. Louis to Fort Benton, about 2,600 river miles. Their cabin became a parlor—the “gubernatorial mansion.” They hosted poetry readings, backgammon and claret, and educated talk. However, the Meaghers had money problems. Meagher never had time to invest in a mine or some land (294-95). During summer and fall 1866, Meagher introduced Libby to Montana’s mountains, crossing over the Continental Divide to the Clark Fork, then north from Missoula through the Flathead Valley to St. Ignatius. He found Jesuits again at the Mission of St. Ignatius (294-96).

More politics. In 1866, Sanders was defeated for election as territorial delegate to Congress. He plotted to bring a new governor to Virginia City. Montana Republicans leaned on leaders of their party in Washington to appoint someone who fell in line with the Freemasons and other upstanding people in the territory. The Vigilance Committee also continued its hangings (296).

Green Clay Smith arrived as Montana’s new governor in late 1866. Smith was a member of Congress from Kentucky. He also had been a general in the Union army. Although he was an evangelical Christian, he and Meagher became fast friends. However, Smith decided to leave Montana after only three months, giving full power back to Meagher (297).

In early 1867, Sanders traveled to Washington to cripple his Montana rival. The mid-term 1866 elections had given Republicans more power than they’d ever had. Sanders claimed Meagher was a fraud and had to be shut down. In response, Congress passed a sweeping measure nullifying all laws passed in the 1866 assembly, an “extraordinary and unprecedented action.” Back in Montana, a posse of vigilantes told Meagher to leave. Afterward, a crude note was dropped off at the governor’s cabin, picturing a body hanging from a tree, and a noose around a name: “General Meagher” (298).

Fort Benton. In late June 1867, Meagher traveled to Fort Benton to pick up a cache of arms to use against the Indians. After much resistance, General Sherman had agreed to send weapons for the territory’s defense. Red Cloud’s Sioux had killed 80 soldiers in northern Wyoming. The rest of the Bozeman Trail was closed to all travel. John Bozeman was killed, supposedly by the Blackfeet. Whites in Virginia City called for war against the Indians. Meagher organized a militia, but didn’t find any Indians to fight. Along the way, Meagher had to stop for six days. He could go no farther because of an intestinal disorder (300-01).

Meagher eventually reached Fort Benton on July 1, 1867. He was instantly recognized as he hobbled down a boardwalk fronting the Missouri. He went to the home of prominent merchant I.G. Baker. Baker told him that neither his back pay or Sherman’s shipment of guns had arrived. Sanders, who had just returned to Fort Benton from Washington, D.C., after Congress voided the work of Montana’s legislature, joined them. Meagher waved him off, retreating to the back room of Baker’s house to read the paper, work on official business and answer some correspondence (302-03).

Meagher’s last night. Johnny Doran, pilot of the *G.A. Thompson* river boat, who had brought Libby to Fort Benton a year earlier, invited Meagher to dine with him and spend the night in a guest room on his boat. Although Meagher explained he wasn’t well, Doran insisted. Doran also had a decent library. He and Meagher had dinner on the boat. After dinner, they walked along Front Street, then returned to the boat. Doran escorted Meagher to his stateroom, on the side open to the

river on the upper deck. Meagher insisted that Doran stay with him. However, Doran had some business to attend to, so he left Meagher alone in his guest room with a novel (303-04).

At about 10:00 p.m., a crewman on the *G.A. Thompson's* lower deck heard a cry and a splash. He also said he heard gasps, a gurgling sound—the desperate noise of struggle. Doran knew immediately that it was Meagher. He ran to the shore and raced downstream, calling out. He heard “two agonizing cries from the man, the first one very short, the last prolonged.” Small boats were launched. However, they found no trace of Meagher (304-05).

Sanders announced Meagher's death, implying it was a suicide. He claimed that Meagher appeared to be deranged while he was on the street, demanding a revolver to defend himself, on the afternoon before his death. Sanders claimed he tucked Meagher into bed on the river boat. However, Doran, who actually put Meagher to bed, later stated that nothing of that sort happened (305).

Sanders also stated that a witness had told him that Meagher had jumped into the water in his nightclothes. No one believed Sanders' version of Meagher's disappearance. Egan states that Sanders' story has not stood up. However, Sanders kept promoting that story and the righteousness of the vigilantes' cause generally throughout his life (305-08).

In her three-volume *A History of Montana*, Sanders' daughter-in-law Helen Sanders also wrote that the killers Sanders had unleashed were a force for good, that the summary executions were necessary and hangings all justified, because they “had the support of every decent, law-abiding citizen of the community.” If they got a few things wrong, if an innocent man was strangled to death or a family banished without cause, if the Constitution was trampled on, so be it (310).

Throughout the East, wherever men lived who knew of Meagher, there was disbelief. The idea that he died by accident was preposterous. They also didn't believe he had tripped over a coil of rope on deck. Even if Meagher did fall, he was a strong swimmer. Meagher's friends believed it more likely that he was assassinated. A huge crowd gathered at Cooper Union in New York to remember Meagher's life. Richard O'Gorman, a childhood friend, delivered the eulogy (305-08).

Libby left the territory by steamboat from Fort Benton in late summer 1867, never sure what had happened to her husband. She was cut out of her father's inheritance by her marriage to Meagher. She lived modestly on a \$50 per month Civil War widow's pension. She never remarried. She returned to Montana only once, in 1887, to visit Yellowstone National Park (308-09).

The coroner's inquest. On June 9, 2012, a coroner's inquest was staged as a play at the courthouse in Virginia City, using all the available evidence. Paul Wylie, an attorney, author and Montana historian, felt the need to close a circle, since no original inquest had ever been done. He assembled a real judge, lawyers and medical professionals to examine Meagher's last night. Witnesses were called, evidence was presented and closing arguments were made.

At the conclusion, a jury of six found that Meagher's death was a homicide and Sanders was the culprit (314-15). However, a more recent on-line article claims that Meagher fell overboard as the result of delirium tremens resulting from not drinking, in turn possibly causing a seizure or cardiac event when he landed in the river.³¹

VI. Conclusion.

Meagher spent less than two years as Montana's acting governor. His primary life story instead is that of an Irish nationalist and advocate. Meagher always acted from that perspective, initially in Ireland and later in the United States, no matter in what role he was then serving.

Meagher's purpose was to improve the condition of the Irish people, wherever they might be. He always acted courageously in saying and doing what he believed was right, regardless of its consequences. His short career as Montana's acting governor, and his interactions with Sanders and the Vigilance Committee, confirm that he always lived fearlessly in accordance with his principles.

End Notes

1. Meagher's portrait is shown in Appendix 1.
2. Paul G. Ulrich grew up in Butte. He graduated from Butte High School (1956), the University of Montana (B.A. 1961) and Stanford Law School (J.D. 1964). He practiced as an appellate lawyer in Phoenix for 46 years. Address: 7550 N. 16th Street, #6107, Phoenix AZ 85020. Telephone: (602) 485-5521. E-mail: paul3707@aol.com.
3. The statue at the Montana capitol is shown in Appendix 2.
4. TIMOTHY EGAN, *THE IMMORTAL IRISHMAN* 309 (2016).
5. DAVID M. EMMONS, *THE BUTTE IRISH: CLASS AND ETHNICITY IN AN AMERICAN MINING TOWN* 21 (1990).
6. Vince Devlin, *Thomas Meagher was man of many lives*, <http://missoulian.com> (July 4, 2010) (viewed January 27, 2018). For discussion of the 1894 capital city election, see Paul G. Ulrich, *Montana Newspaper History (1864-1959)* (unpublished article, 2017); Paul G. Ulrich, *Early Butte History* (unpublished article, 2014).
7. Daly played an important role in Butte's and Montana's early history. See, e.g., Paul G. Ulrich, *Where I'm From: Butte and the Clarks* (unpublished article, 2017); Paul G. Ulrich, *Montana Newspaper History (1864-1959)* (unpublished article, 2016); Paul G. Ulrich, *Early Butte History* (unpublished article, 2014).
8. EMMONS 20.
9. EMMONS.
10. Devlin.
11. EGAN 276-77.
12. www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink...Thomas_Francis_Meagher_statue_Waterford_County (viewed January 27, 2018). See Appendix 4.
13. www.green-wood.com/2017 (viewed January 27, 2018). See Appendix 4.
14. *Id.* Photographs of the Green-Wood bust are shown in Appendices 3 and 4.
15. Devlin.
16. Pinterest, *Explore Irish Celtic, Ephemera and more!*, <https://it.pinterest.com> (viewed January 28, 2018).

17. Inbody; Nine Fine Irishmen, <https://www.newyorknewyork.com/en/restaurants/nine-fine-irishmen.html#/History> (viewed January 29, 2018). However, those legendary stories are mostly untrue. See Taylor Kingston, *Origin of the "Nine Famous Irishmen" Story*, <https://groups.google.com/forum/#topic/soc.culture.irish/L-vWigDL-OK> (November 5, 2009) (viewed January 29, 2018).
18. Telephone conversation with Hugh W. Craig (January 29, 2018).
19. Kristen Inbody, *7 ways to touch Thomas Meagher's legacy in Montana*, greatfallstribune.com (April 21, 2016) (viewed January 27, 2018). A photograph of the Meagher Bar is shown in Appendix 4.
20. Meagher County, Montana, https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Meagher_County,_Montana (viewed January 28, 2018).
21. See generally EGAN; Thomas Francis Meagher, Wikipedia.org (viewed September 13, 2017).
22. EGAN 310-18. See also *How Did Thomas Francis Meagher Really Die?*, <https://dailyhistory.org> (viewed January 29, 2018).
23. EGAN.
24. TIMOTHY EGAN, *THE BIG BURN* (2009).
25. TIMOTHY EGAN, *THE WORST HARD TIME* (2006).
26. IrishCentral Staff, *Major movie on Thomas Francis Meagher, Irish patriot, US hero, to be shot*, www.irishcentral.com (April 15, 2017) (viewed January 27, 2018).
27. *History of the potato*, wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_potato (viewed February 3, 2018).
28. For the full text of Meagher's "Sword" speech, see www.libraryireland.com/MeagherIrishOratory/Index.php (viewed February 3, 2018).
29. For the full text of Meagher's "Dock" speech, see *Thomas Francis Meagher speech from the dock*, <https://waterfordcivilwarveterans.wordpress.com/2011/01/05thomas-francis-meagher-speech-from-the-dock/> (viewed February 3, 2018).
30. A photograph of the cabin is shown in Appendix 5.
31. *How Did Thomas Francis Meagher Really Die?*, https://dailyhistory.org/How_Did_Thomas_Francis_Meagher_-_Really_Die%3F (viewed January 29, 2018).