

Vindicating Ireland: Mathew Carey as Irish Nationalist and Historian

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Reflecting on his many past accomplishments in the United States, Mathew Carey claimed in his autobiography that he counted the publication of his 1819 work, the *The Vindiciae Hibernicae: or, Ireland Vindicated*, “among the most important operations” of his life.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he deemed the subject of the work so important that he devoted nearly 1/5 of his autobiography to it.<sup>2</sup> The *Vindiciae* is a lengthy refutation of the then popular myth of seventeenth-century Irish Catholic atrocity. Its publication fulfilled a life-long desire in Carey to challenge and perhaps overturn the Protestant myths used to discredit and subjugate his fellow Irish Catholics. However, despite his pride in the finished product, Carey did not believe the work had as wide an impact as it should have. Nor did it reach the audience that mattered the most. He confessed in his autobiography: “I confidently expected that the work would be reprinted in England and Ireland, or at all events in the latter,— but I have been greatly disappointed.”<sup>3</sup> The expectation that the *Vindiciae* would have an impact in Ireland at a point when the campaign for Catholic emancipation was gaining momentum was, Carey confessed, one of the primary reasons that compelled him to write it in the first place. The work, he further lamented, was “scarcely necessary” in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Yet despite Carey’s later misgivings about the necessity and wider appeal of the *Vindiciae* in America, the work was indeed relevant and its mission pertinent to the growing Irish Catholic immigrant communities across the new nation. Though Carey clearly intended future European editions, the first edition was directed at an American audience. In its preface Carey made it clear that the topic was worth Americans’ consideration, not least because the myth of past Catholic treachery

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Dublin, 1998), 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Mathew Carey, “Autobiography of Mathew Carey. Letter XIV” *The New-England Magazine* 6:5 (May, 1834), 400.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 400.

underscored anti-Irish prejudice in the United States as well as in Britain. This paper assesses the evolution of Carey's support for Irish independence and his nationalist stance on Irish history within the context of the changes and difficulties facing Irish America in the early republic. Many of the themes discussed here have been addressed in Martin J. Burke's in-depth chapter of the *Vindiciae*. Burke located Carey's history within the larger framework of Irish nationalist historiography.<sup>5</sup> This essay builds upon previous work by evaluating the significance of Carey's output on these subjects to an Irish America in demographic and cultural transition.

### Mathew Carey and an Irish America in Transition

Mathew Carey's life and career in the United States spanned a period of change in the complexion and character of Irish America. His works on Irish history and his career-long defense of Irish political reform were instrumental in the establishment of Irish-American ethnic identity in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Carey arrived in Philadelphia during a period of flux for Irish America. The overwhelming majority of Irish immigrants who arrived before the Revolution were Protestants, primarily Ulster Presbyterians.<sup>7</sup> This remained true through the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The continued predominance of Ulster Presbyterians among Irish

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<sup>5</sup> Martin J. Burke, "The Politics and Poetics of Nationalist Historiography: Mathew Carey and the *Vindiciae Hibernicae*" in Joep Leerssen, A.H. van der Weel, and Bart Westerweel, ed., *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History* (Amsterdam, 1995), 183-194.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the life of Mathew Carey see: James N. Green, *Mathew Carey, publisher and patriot* (Philadelphia, 1985); Kenneth Wyer Rowe, *Mathew Carey: A Study in American Economic Development* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1933); Earl L. Bradsher, *Mathew Carey, Editor, Author and Publisher: A Study in American Literary Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912); and Edward C. Carter II, "The Political Activities of Mathew Carey, Nationalist, 1760-1814" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1962). For a comprehensive list of Carey's publications see William Clarkin, *Mathew Carey: A Bibliography of His Publications, 1785-1824* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> The most significant examination of Ulster Presbyterian emigration in the eighteenth century remains R.J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718-1775* (London, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Maldwyn A. Jones, "Ulster Emigration, 1783-1815," in E.R.R. Green, ed., *Essays in Scotch-Irish History* (London, 1969), 46-68.

immigrants to post-revolutionary North America complicates the traditional division between the “Protestant” Irish-America of the eighteenth century and the “Catholic” model often applied to the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the growing presence and influence of Catholic communities as well as the Protestant backlash against this growth demanded a re-calibration of Irish ethnic identity in the new nation.

Scholars increasingly view the late eighteenth century as a period of relatively strong inter-denominational cohesion within the national Irish community compared with the sectarian tensions that would divide it along religious lines from the late 1820s onwards. Kerby Miller claims that the Revolution “accelerated Ulster Presbyterian immigrants’ tendency to embrace – and of Anglo-Americans to perceive – a generic and positive ‘Irish’ identity.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly this acceptance was aided by the positive inversion in the lead up to the revolution of the term “republican,” previously an insult hurled at Calvinist dissenters in the middle and southern colonies, and increased American recognition of the legitimacy of past Irish resistance to English rule in light of their own struggles with London. Fraternal societies emerged that championed an inclusive ethnic identification among Irish immigrants. The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, for example, stipulated that membership be open to “the descendents of Irish parents on either side in the first degree” regardless of religion.<sup>11</sup> In the decades that followed the revolution many people of Scots Irish descent dropped claims to an ethnic Irishness, choosing instead to identify themselves with

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (Longman, 2000), 2-5.

<sup>10</sup> Kerby Miller, “‘Scotch-Irish’ Ethnicity in Early America: Its Regional and Political Origins” in Kerby A. Miller, *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin, 2008), 134. For differing meanings of “Irishness” to immigrants to America see chapter 8 in the same volume: “‘Scotch-Irish,’ ‘Black Irish,’ and ‘Real Irish’: Emigrants and Identities in the Old South,” 142-5. For a discussion on the usefulness of the term ‘Scotch-Irish’ see Miller’s “Ulster Presbyterians and the ‘Two Traditions’ in Ireland and America” in J.J. Lee and Marion Casey, ed., *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, (New York, 2007), 255-60.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Maurice J. Bric, *Ireland, Philadelphia and the Re-invention of America, 1760-1800* (Dublin, 2008), 156. For more information on the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick see Bric, *Ireland*, 153-156, 308-309; and J. H. Caldwell, *History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and the Hibernian Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1892).

the nation that many of them had helped to found.<sup>12</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed, the popularity of evangelical Protestantism reignited fears of “popery” while, simultaneously, the increasing numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants – especially from 1825 onwards – precipitated the emergence of a new “Scotch-Irish” identity among the progeny of Ulster Presbyterian migrants.<sup>13</sup>

Carey himself is often said to be an early example of the exile generation of immigrants who arrived primarily in the 1790s.<sup>14</sup> Like later Irish political exiles arriving in America in the wake of the 1798 and 1803 risings, his immigrant experience was inextricably bound to late eighteenth-century transatlantic radicalism. He stepped onto the quays in Philadelphia not as an economic migrant or pilgrim like the thousands of predominately Presbyterian Irish migrants before him, but as an exile, suffering the humiliation of someone forced unjustly from their homeland. His political commitment to the universal implementation of the ideals espoused by Irish and colonial patriots (or, as Margaret McAleer has recently argued, his endorsement of Lockean and Paine-ite concepts of civil society) during the 1770s and 80s, however, ensured the quick transition from ex-patriot Irishman to immigrant American.<sup>15</sup>

Carey’s commitment to the economic and political advancement of the United States, however, never eclipsed his interest in Irish affairs or his willingness to identify himself as an Irishman. He was committed to the welfare and progress of his

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick Griffin convincingly argues that Scots Irish settlers on the frontier adopted a unifying British identity during the Seven Years’ War: *The People with no Name: Ireland’s Ulster Scots, America’s Scots Irish, and the Creation of A British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton, 2001), 157-173.

<sup>13</sup> Miller et al, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1765-1815* (Oxford, 2003), 103. For the increasing rates of Catholic migration in the 1820s and 30s see: Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985), 196-97.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, 1997), 174-75; David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Dublin, 1998), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret H. McAleer, “In Defense of Civil Society: Irish Radicals in Philadelphia during the 1790s,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1:1 (Spring, 2003), 177-180.

fellow immigrants. From 1790, Carey served as the first secretary of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland. The Hibernian Society provided support to worthy immigrants in need regardless of their religious background. As secretary, the responsibility of determining the worthiness of applicants fell to Carey.<sup>16</sup> The society's officers took a paternalistic approach to poor relief by emphasizing a moral divide between the deserving and undeserving poor. The secretary often required a character reference as well as a biographical explanation as to how the immigrant became destitute. Carey's commitment to the reformation of manners among Irish immigrants was at least partially motivated by the fear that poor behavior might confirm widely held negative stereotypes of the Irish. After a particularly rowdy St. Patrick's Day celebration in 1786, for example, Carey suggested that Philadelphia's "respectable" Irish citizens organize to prevent such activities happening again.<sup>17</sup>

Led by the same spirit of improvement that fueled his professional and charitable careers, Carey became an active proponent for increased European immigration to the United States. In 1826 he published a pamphlet arguing that greater immigration was necessary to boost agricultural and industrial production and to take advantage of the immense natural resources that the continent had to offer. Once the United States reached its demographic ceiling it could take its place as a power rivaling, or even eclipsing, the European nations. Such a policy would also give advantage to the countries supplying the immigrants as it would ease the demographic strain caused by overpopulation. When discussing Ireland, Carey could not help but mention the circumstances that lay behind the current woes of "that ill-

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<sup>16</sup> For Carey and the moral imperative of charitable reform see: S. D. Kimmel, "Sentimental Police Struggles for 'Sound Policy and Economy' Amidst the Torpor of Philanthropy in Mathew Carey's Philadelphia" *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3:1 (Spring, 2005), 164-226.

<sup>17</sup> McAleer, "In Defense of Civil Society," 193.

fated” country.<sup>18</sup> His conclusions matched exactly those reached by previous Irish reformers and voiced by later nationalists: English policy and indifferent landlords were to blame for Ireland’s economic stagnation.<sup>19</sup> Armed as ever with statistical evidence, Carey claimed: “The superabundance of the unemployed population of Ireland arises from the ruinous policy of the government, and the extravagant drains of the national wealth by the absentees, being no less that \$13,500,000 per annum.”<sup>20</sup> Great Britain also stood to benefit from US sponsored Irish emigration because it would no longer be forced to cover the costs of shipping Irish migrants to Canada or the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>21</sup> Later in the essay, Carey advertised American religious liberty to prospective migrants in the hope of enticing immigrants. For over a century Irish Protestant Dissenters and Catholics had been legally bound to pay tithes towards the maintenance of the Protestant Church of Ireland. Anger towards this policy had been one of the primary push factors behind eighteenth-century Ulster Presbyterian migration.<sup>22</sup> Carey addressed this injustice, telling prospective migrants that in America they would not be compelled to pay tithes to a “clergyman over whose appointment he has had no control, and whose religion he perhaps abhors.”<sup>23</sup>

Between 1789 and 1792 Carey’s publishing house catered to the needs of the resident Catholic community, its publications including the first American edition of the Douai Bible.<sup>24</sup> This edition of the Douai Bible was a remarkable success given the relatively small size of the American Catholic population. Michael Carter points out that Carey’s self-conscious promotion of Catholic print culture in the early republic

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<sup>18</sup> Mathew Carey, “Reflections on the Subject of Emigration from Europe, with a View to Settlement in the United States: containing Brief Sketches of the Moral and Political Character of this Country” in *Miscellaneous Essays* (Philadelphia, 1830), 121.

<sup>19</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (London, 2000), 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 120-121.

<sup>22</sup> Dickson, *Ulster Emigration*, 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Carter, ““Under the Benign Sun of Toleration”: Mathew Carey, the Douai Bible, and Catholic Print Culture, 1789-1791” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27:3 (Fall 2007), 437-469.

encouraged Catholics to assert themselves as citizens and to embrace the republican values of the new nation.<sup>25</sup> Carey's Catholic publishing endeavors, as well as his attempts to debunk the myth of Irish conspiracy and his later calls for toleration in reaction to revitalized Protestant evangelicalism in the 1820s, helped establish and legitimize Catholicism in the United States.

Throughout his life Carey remained committed to an inclusive definition of Irish ethnicity in America. His publishing career, however, laid the framework upon which subsequent generations of Irish-Americans could anchor a more self-consciously Catholic and Gaelic ethnic identity, particularly during the nativist storms of the mid-nineteenth century. It is perhaps fortunate that Carey died five years before waves of nativist riots rocked Philadelphia in the spring and summer of 1844. These disturbances erupted after the Philadelphia Board of Controllers made the modest concession to Catholic parents that their children would be allowed to read the Douai bible rather than the Protestant King James edition as part of their curriculum at school.<sup>26</sup> Nativist vitriol and agitation on the occasion of the riots that followed, culminating in the destruction of St. Augustine's Church, was perhaps the most striking and symbolically pertinent rejection of both Carey's vision of a tolerant republic and his dream that anti-Irish prejudice might be overcome in the new world.

#### 1641 and Mathew Carey's *Vindiciae Hibernicae*

From the beginning of mass European settlement, the Irish in America confronted negative stereotypes regarding their religion and ethnic character based

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 468.

<sup>26</sup> Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840," *History of Education Quarterly*, 8:1 (Spring, 1968), 44-106.



upon popular misunderstanding of their island's troubled history.<sup>27</sup> Protestant propaganda in Britain and Ireland laid the blame for the wars and bloodshed that defined seventeenth-century Irish history at the feet of the Catholic majority. These writers portrayed the native Irish as "wild" savages acting under the influence of their clergy in their quest to take vengeance on Protestants for the injustice that they exacted upon their ancestors. The Irish of Protestant mythology were scheming and violent by nature, a fact that later underpinned American concerns about Irish migration. Although always present in reactionary newspapers and pamphlets, such stereotypes reemerged strengthened during the first two decades of the nineteenth century in light of increased Catholic immigration into American cities. Concerned about the reputation of his native country and the misrepresentation of its people, Mathew Carey set out to refute the negative image of Irish Catholics by exposing the historical lies upon which it was based. In 1819 he published his most robust defense of Irish Catholics, *The Vindiciae Hibernicae* in which he took aim at the literature documenting the 1641 rebellion.<sup>28</sup> Like many previous Catholic authors, Carey argued that the alleged atrocities committed during the rebellion formed the basis of a myth used to justify the continued oppression of Catholic Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

The literary history of the 1641 rising began with the collection of over 8,000 testimonials taken during the 1640s and 50s from Protestant victims of violence and displacement.<sup>30</sup> They were compiled in order to bring insurgents to justice and to settle claims of lost or damaged property. Protestant propagandists mined the

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<sup>27</sup> Griffin, *The People with No Name*, 102-03; Benjamin Bankhurst, "A Looking-Glass for Presbyterians: Recasting a Prejudice in Late-Colonial Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 133 (2009), 317-348; Edward C. Carter II, "A "Wild Irishman" under every Federalist's Bed: Naturalization in Philadelphia, 1789-1806," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 94 (1970), 180-81.

<sup>28</sup> Mathew Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae: or, Ireland Vindicated: An Attempt to Develop and Expose a Few of the Multifarious Errors and Falsehoods Respecting Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1819).

<sup>29</sup> See Jacqueline Hill, "1641 and the quest for Catholic Emancipation, 1691-1829" in Brian Mac Cuarta, ed. *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising* (Belfast, 1993), 159-171.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the depositions see: <http://1641.tcd.ie/>.

depositions for stories of torture and massacre in order to propagate a partisan interpretation of recent events. Cromwell later used such interpretations to justify the brutality of his Irish campaigns and the subsequent seizure of Catholic lands.<sup>31</sup> Sir John Temple, the Master of the Irish Rolls at Dublin Castle, composed the most famous collection of depositions in his 1646 book entitled *The Irish rebellion*.<sup>32</sup> Temple ignored violence directed towards Catholics and claimed that culpability largely lay with the Catholic clerical establishment who inflamed hatred for “hereticks.”<sup>33</sup> Temple’s collection was wildly successful, a fact born out by its publication record over the next two centuries. Between its initial printing and 1812 it was reprinted at least ten times in Britain and Ireland, often during periods of social anxiety.<sup>34</sup> This total does not take into account the myriad cheaper pamphlets that plundered Temple’s account and exposed the stories contained within his collection to a wider audience who were unable to afford the high price of the original.

In the wake of *The Irish Rebellion*’s success a few Catholic authors and sympathizers attempted to counter Temple’s biased account by pointing out faults in his chronology of events and by demonstrating evidence of Catholic victimization during the rising.<sup>35</sup> In 1758, a young Dublin doctor named John Curry resurrected arguments made after the Restoration by Catholic apologists regarding the nature of the rising. Curry was a Catholic whose family had lost land during the seventeenth-

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<sup>31</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630-1800* (Oxford, 2008), 94-96 and Green, *Mathew Carey*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> For Temple and within the context of the Protestant martyrological tradition see Kathleen Noonan, ““Martyrs in Flames”: Sir John Temple and the Conception of the Irish in English Martyrologies,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 36:2 (Summer, 2004), 223-255.

<sup>33</sup> Sir. John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion* [...], (Dublin, 1716), 73.

<sup>34</sup> Toby Barnard, ‘1641: A Bibliographic Essay’ in Mac Cuarta, ed. *Ulster 1641*, 178-79. The publication of Temple or discussion of 1641 in America also occurred at points of anxiety, including the beginning of the Seven Years War or in the aftermath of the Paxton expedition. See Anonymous] *Popish Cruelty displayed: being a full and true Account Of the Bloody and Hellish Massacre in Ireland...in 1641* (Boston, 1753). Such pamphlets may have helped an American audience contextualize the Indian violence to come in the following years within the larger paradigm of international Protestant victimization.

<sup>35</sup> Notably R. S., *A Collection of Some of the Murthers and Massacres committed on the Irish in Ireland Since the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1641* (London, 1662).

century confiscations. Writing under the guise of a concerned Protestant, Curry composed *A brief account from the most authentic protestant writers of the causes, motives, and mischiefs, of the Irish rebellion....1641* (London, 1747), in which he set out to expose the irregularities and inconsistencies in the Protestant record of events. For example, he attacked Temple on his account of how the rebellion first erupted, claiming that the massacre of Catholics at Islandmagee by the English and Scottish garrison at Carrickfergus precipitated Catholic attacks on Protestants and not – as Temple held – vice versa.<sup>36</sup> Curry's pamphlet caused uproar, inciting outrage within Protestant communities across the island. Its publication provoked Walter Harris, the leading Irish historian of the day, to publish a lengthy retort, *Fiction unmasked: or, an answer to a dialogue lately published by a popish physitian, [...] wherein the causes, motives, and mischiefs of the Irish rebellion and massacres in 1641 are laid thick upon the protestants* (Dublin, 1752). The nerve struck by Curry was still raw a decade later when John Wesley arrived in Ireland on his second mission to the north. He recorded his observations in his journal:

I read an account of the Irish Rebellion wrote by Dr. Curry, a Papist of Dublin, who labours to wash the Ethiop [sic] white by numberless falsehoods and prevarications. But he is treated according to his merit by Mr. Harris, in a tract entitled, *Fiction Unmasked*.<sup>37</sup>

Wesley's antipathy towards Curry's position demonstrates how integral tales of Catholic atrocity were to Protestant identity and, therefore, the difficulties faced by revisionist writers including John Curry and Mathew Carey in their attempts to set the record straight.

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<sup>36</sup> John Curry, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the Year 1641* (London, 1662). See also R.S. *A Collection of Some of the Murthers and Massacres*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Wesley's Journal, 15 April 1758, , in Elisabeth Jay, ed., *The Journal of John Wesley, A Selection* (Oxford, 1987), 142-43.

The immediate impetus for Carey's entry into the debate over the nature of the 1641 rebellion was the publication of William Godwin's 1817 novel, *Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England*. Godwin's protagonist, Charles Mandeville, cannot escape his memories of massacre and civil war that he experienced as a boy in Ireland following the Catholic rising.<sup>38</sup> Carey worried that the popularity of the novel in the United States might revive the myth of Irish responsibility for the rebellion and therefore both reinforce anti-Irish sentiment in the country and prejudice popular opinion against reform in Ireland itself.

Though spurred to write by the popularity of *Mandeville*, Carey directed his attack against the earlier works responsible for the myths that had prejudiced Godwin in the first place, notably John Temple's *History of the Irish Rebellion*. While Curry questioned the sequence of events that led to rebellion as well as the dates upon which the supposed Catholic atrocities occurred, in chapter fifteen Carey exposed the absurdity of a national Catholic conspiracy. Distance from seventeenth-century manuscript sources partially defined the nature of the project. For the most part, the strength of Carey's arguments rested on the exposure of inconsistencies, inflated data, and impossibilities in the narratives of his opponents. He brought very little new information to the debate, choosing instead to erode reader confidence in his opponents' narratives through detailed source criticism.

However, proving historical fabrications at a distance occasionally led Carey to make creative use of the resources available to him. Temple recorded a deposition taken from Owen O'Connally, a Protestant from Monimore near Derry, that allegedly proved the existence of a nationwide conspiracy to murder all Protestants except those

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<sup>38</sup> For more on Godwin, Ireland, and his use of 1641 see: Burke, "Politics and Poetics," 186-189.

who helped purge the island of their brethren.<sup>39</sup> According to Temple, O’Connally received an invitation to meet conspirator Cornel Hugh Oge Mac-Mahon at his residence in Dublin in late October 1641.<sup>40</sup> O’Connally accepted the invitation and arrived in Dublin at night four days later. The two then called on Lord Maguire at his nearby estate where O’Connally learned of the conspiracy. In his dismissal of the account, Carey claimed that it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for O’Connally to travel such a large distance in so little time. Also, it would have been difficult for him to find a stranger’s house in complete darkness.<sup>41</sup> To cast further doubt on the situation, Carey wrote to Robert Paterson, the Vice Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, asking him to confirm the lunar conditions for late October 1641. Paterson replied, stating that “it was a New Moon, at Dublin, at about 2 o’c in the Morning, of the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, 1641” therefore it must have been “invisible, on the whole night of the 22d – 23d, of that month.”<sup>42</sup> The exposure of such seemingly insignificant lies, Carey hoped, would wear down the credibility of both the original deponents before the 1641 claims commission as well as the authors who later used those testimonies to disenfranchise Catholics.

### Irish immigration and the legacy of 1641 in the Early Republic

Why did the Irish antiquarian debates about “who started what” and “who did what to whom” in 1641 matter to Americans? Carey admitted that some American

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<sup>39</sup> John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion: or, An History of the Beginnings and first Progresse of the Gneral Rebellion raised within the Kingdom of Ireland, upon the three and twentieth day of October, in the Year, 1641* (London, 1646), 18-21.

<sup>40</sup> Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (1819), 318-319.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 326.

<sup>42</sup> R.M. Paterson to Mathew Carey, 6 Jan 1819. Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Series 5c, Carey section, Mathew Carey, incoming correspondence. Vol. 1. No. 246. Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae*, (1819), 326. The exposure of O’Connally’s false testimony was key to Carey’s argument regarding the impossibility of a nationwide conspiracy to murder Protestants. Carey deemed it so important that he later republished lengthy selections from the O’Connally case in his autobiography: Mathew Carey, “The Autobiography of Mathew Carey, Letter XVII, *The New-England Magazine*, 7:1 (July, 1834), 61-64.

observers might question the need for yet another lengthy exposition over the minute details of an event that occurred across an ocean nearly two hundred years earlier.<sup>43</sup> To this he claimed his investigation was both pertinent and timely because bigoted accounts written after the rebellion to justify the oppression of Catholics “sowed, and still continue to sow, a copious seed of the most vulgar and rancorous prejudices in the mind of man against his fellow man.”<sup>44</sup> While perhaps not immediately obvious, Americans continued to harbor the anti-Irish chauvinism instilled in their European ancestors by Temple and other pro-English authors. “Many of these prejudices,” he claimed, “have been transplanted from their native soil by emigrants, and have taken root in this country.”<sup>45</sup> In this way then, misinformation regarding the rebellion continued to haunt Irish immigrants in the New World just as it had done in their native country. Carey drove this point home when he discussed the *Vindiciae* in his autobiography. He interrupted the grisly topic of alleged atrocity during the rebellion with some light “summer reading” detailing past encounters with strangers who made anti-Irish comments to him before realizing that he was an Irishman.<sup>46</sup>

Carey himself repeatedly confronted the stereotype of the violent Irishman throughout his publishing career in the United States. During the late 1790s, at the height of the Adams’ administration’s attempts to marginalize its foreign-born opponents through the implementation of the Alien and Sedition Acts, Carey’s political opponents in Philadelphia utilized historical stereotypes of the “wild” Irish to rouse public suspicion regarding the political activities of the Irish exile community.

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<sup>43</sup> Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (1819), xviii.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, x. For Carey’s consistent interest in both Irish immigrant relief and Irish politics while resident in the United States see: Bric, *Ireland, Philadelphia and the Re-Invention of America*, 159-161, 230-231; Miller, et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, 102-105, 299-301, 588-593; and Rowe, *Mathew Carey*, 27-28.

<sup>45</sup> Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (1819), xi

<sup>46</sup> Mathew Carey, “The Auobiography of Mathew Carey” *The New-England Magazine*, 7:1 (July, 1834), 65-67.

The Federalist press marked Carey for particularly strong abuse given his primacy within the Jeffersonian print machine. In 1798 he found himself at the receiving end of a sting of abusive letters published by John Ward Fenno and William Cobbett in both *The Gazette of the United States* and *Porcupine's Gazette*. These letters attacked the “Jesuitical” activities and revolutionary agenda of the United Irishmen in America, and by extension Carey – or “O’Carey,” as he and his brother James were derisively labeled by William Cobbett.<sup>47</sup>

Fenno began one tirade by asking two questions regarding the recent tumult in Ireland: “What is an *United Irishman*?” and “May not Irishmen unite as well as we?” In answering these questions, Fenno asked his readers to consider the historical reasons that lay behind Ireland’s deep-rooted societal and ethnic divisions. He conceded that an “Irish *gentleman* is one of the finest characters in nature.” Unfortunately, Ireland’s famed gentlemen, poets, or statesmen were not among those migrating to America, for there was another Ireland, one whose character and history, Fenno asserted, was “written in *blood*.” The Irish masses, he argued, had “degenerated into the most brutal ignorance, whilst from the extremity of opposition in their character, which distinguishes them in a peculiar manner from all the rest of the world.” Owing to the majority’s vicious temperament, “Ireland has been a Golgotha from the earliest period of history.” He claimed that the United Irishmen originated from out of the bloody crucible of Irish history and that the very nature of the Irish nation made unity in that country impossible. The presence of the United Irishmen in the fledgling United States, therefore, was poisonous. Fenno warned: “By

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, 244.

carnage and plunder they subsisted there: in massacre and ravage they can alone be happy here.”<sup>48</sup>

The historical memory of past Irish atrocity remained pertinent in America at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Fenno requested that his readers remain vigilant and suspicious of these radical Irish refugees, asking them if “the victims of St. Bartholomew’s day imagined, an hour before their fate, the terrible stroke which awaited them?”<sup>49</sup> To underscore the threat posed by these revolutionaries, Fenno inserted a list of a dozen known Irish conspirators, including Congressman Mathew Lyon and Carey’s brother James. This list constituted a fraction of the total number of United Irishmen in the United States, totaling, in Fenno’s estimation “FORTY THOUSAND effective men.” Other Federalist publishers exposed the alleged links between the United Irishmen and their American supporters. The *Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette* reported that “amongst the papers of the United Irish Directory, detected in Ireland, were minutes of the receipt of money from Societies in the United States, for the purpose of carrying on rebellion and massacre.”<sup>50</sup> This report hinted that when it came to the Catholic Irish the words “rebellion” and “massacre” remained intertwined in the American imagination.

Carey reacted to personal jibes and the attacks made against his fellow expatriots in a 1799 pamphlet addressed to William Cobbett entitled *A Plumb Pudding for the [...] Peter Porcupine*. He brushed Fenno’s diatribes aside as histrionic propaganda, pointing out that one of the men alleged to be an United Irishman in Fenno’s exposé had successfully sued him for libel.<sup>51</sup> Carey reserved most of his

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<sup>48</sup> *Gazette of the United States, and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 18 December 1798.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *The Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, Walpole, New Hampshire, 29 April 1799.

<sup>51</sup> Mathew Carey, *A Plumb Pudding for the Humane, Chaste, Valiant Enlightened Peter Porcupine* (Philadelphia: 1799), 28.



efforts for a sustained rebuttal of Cobbett, who had on many occasions publicly raised questions about his loyalty to the United States.<sup>52</sup> To these accusations, Carey made it clear that he was both a proud Irishman and American and that he would not shrink from the challenge of defending his homeland:

Yes, I am an Irishman by birth – although I am a citizen of the United States by residence and by a full compliance with all the regulations and conditions devised for the purpose. The former title I deem as valuable as the latter. I see nothing of my country to render me ashamed of her – and I trust she shall never be shamed of me.<sup>53</sup>

Carey's remarks demonstrate a seemingly open understanding of nationality and citizenship in which personal identification with one country does not preclude loyalty to another.<sup>54</sup> However, Carey argued that other Irish exiles did bring shame upon their country by refusing to stand their ground against their Federalist opponents. They did so because of their marginal position as newcomers who did not want to bring attention to themselves or cause offense. Could these timid patriots, Carey wondered, “perform a greater act of justice, or render a more acceptable service to their insulted country, than by promoting the circulation of [Cobbett's] blood with a good dose of shillelah, administered with due vigour?”<sup>55</sup>

In 1819, the popularity of *Mandeville* had convinced Carey that he had to confront the historical myth that underpinned anti-Irish prejudice in the United States. He did so in the *Vindiciae* by positioning the rebellion beyond a parochial historical debate over the ethno-religious settlement and governance of Ireland. Instead, he claimed that the rising was a battle to preserve the liberties of the people of Ireland from foreign encroachment. The insurgents acted to defend their property from

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<sup>52</sup> Durey, *Transatlantic Rebels*, 244.

<sup>53</sup> Carey, *Plumb Pudding*, 38-39.

<sup>54</sup> See McAleer, 178-180.

<sup>55</sup> Carey, *Plumb Pudding*, 40.

“rapacious individuals” who at the time of the rebellion had already plundered “nearly a million of acres of land” from the native population.<sup>56</sup> Carey therefore concluded that “if the Irish insurgents of 1641 deserved to be stigmatised as traitors and rebels, then were the English revolutionists of 1688, the American of 1776, and the French of 1789, traitors and rebels of the very worst possible kind.”<sup>57</sup> By placing the rising of 1641 in a timeline alongside such honored events as the American and French Revolutions (the latter’s legacy was by 1819 less contentious than it would have been in the 1790s) Carey attempted to demonstrate that Irish patriots (whether in 1641, 1688, or 1798) and the thousands of migrants arriving annually in New York and Philadelphia possessed qualities dear to freeborn Americans. Like their hosts, the Irish could not abide tyrannical government and possessed the manly countenance necessary to protect their liberties from those who would intrude upon them.

#### Audience and impact of the *Vindiciae*

Despite Carey’s attempt to expand discussion of 1641 beyond the sectarian debates of Irish antiquarians, the fact remained that the *Vindiciae* was a five-hundred-page, painfully detailed and largely non-narrative investigation of a particular moment in Irish history. As we have seen, Carey explained in his preface why he thought Americans should read his book. Carey intended the work to have as broad a readership and impact as possible. Out of the 750 copies printed in the first edition, he intended 1/3 of the total to be “gratuitously distributed to public libraries, reading-rooms, and enlightened individuals.”<sup>58</sup> Carey aimed to change popular attitudes through education and to solidify support for his position among those who could further disseminate his point of view.

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<sup>56</sup> Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (1819), xiv.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, xvi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, xxxii.

Carey's incoming correspondence pertaining to the first edition reveals some details pertaining to the work's intended American readership. Many of the "enlightened individuals" to receive a complimentary copy were Irish American or Catholic luminaries. Throughout the autumn of 1819 Carey received letters of thanks and encouragement from various institutions and correspondents to whom he had sent a copy of the *Vindiciae*.<sup>59</sup> Carey sent the work to friends and acquaintances for whom the subject of the text was most pertinent, perhaps most notably his fellow Irish expatriot, Thomas Addis Emmet. Born in Cork and educated in Dublin, Emmet had been a central figure in the campaign for repeal of the Penal Laws and, later, served in the executive of the Society of United Irishmen. He had fled to the United States from France following the suppression of the failed Irish rising of 1803 and the execution of its leader, Thomas's younger brother Robert. Emmet agreed with the aims stated in the preface to the *Vindiciae* even if he had not yet read the entire work. He claimed that he had doubted the accuracy of Temple's account since first reading John Curry's writings in his youth. Carey's research had further convinced him that "the history of Ireland [was] a solid mass of falsehood & imposture, erected on the basis of fraud & perjury" for the benefit of the ruling elite.<sup>60</sup> He continued: "While I doubt not that your work will (produce – many converts as zealous & sincere) as myself, I – hope that they may be more – as joyful in their efforts – & that the propagation of truth & the extension of the principles of free government, which America is teaching by her example, may yet produce the reformation of our beloved Ireland."<sup>61</sup> The ultimate

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<sup>59</sup> Among the institutions and book sellers to receive a copy were the American Philosophical Society (HSP, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection (227A), Series 5c, Carey Section, Mathew Carey, incoming correspondence, Vol. 1, Box Folder 2. No. 5) and James Eastburn at the Literary Rooms, Broadway (*New-York Dailey Advertiser*, 8 April 1819).

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Addis Emmet to Mathew Carey, 22 April 1819, HSP, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection (227A), Series 5c, Carey Section, Mathew Carey, incoming correspondence, Vol. 1, Box 22, Folder 5, No. 68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

goal for Emmet, as it was for Carey, was the liberation of Ireland from the discriminatory legislation under which the majority of its population suffered. Carey's demolition of the partisan mythology surrounding the 1641 rebellion aided in this process by stripping the ruling Protestant junto of its supposed legitimacy.

All correspondents writing to Carey praised the *Vindiciae* and voiced their support for his mission to redeem the reputation of the Irish nation. Ambrose Maréchal, the third Archbishop of Baltimore, wrote to Carey to congratulate him on the work. Maréchal claimed the cause of Ireland was high in the mind of every impartial observer. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Maréchal insinuated that the work would receive a strong Catholic readership. "No doubt," he wrote, "that the vindication of your illustrious country, will be read with a lively interest, by every class of people & particularly by those who love justice, tolerance, true religion & humanity."<sup>62</sup> That Maréchal recognized the work's significance to his expanding Irish flock is perhaps also demonstrated by the fact that he later added his name to the list of subscribers for the printing of the second edition. Langdon Cheves, the president of the Second Bank of the United States also received a complimentary copy of the book from Carey. Like Emmet, Cheves confessed that he had not yet read the work. Nevertheless, he recognized its significance to Irish Americans. In a flowery declaration of support Cheves told Carey: "That heart is destitute of honorable feeling which is not attracted to its native soil by love and sympathy, and the Irishman who can not feel for a country so lovely as his native land must suffer more than the vice of apathy."<sup>63</sup> Cheve's letter, while little more than an acknowledgement of receipt for his copy of the *Vindiciae*, does confirm a pattern running through Carey's incoming

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<sup>62</sup> Ambrose Maréchal the third Archbishop of Baltimore to Mathew Carey, 2 May 1819, HSP, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection (227A), Series 5c, Carey Section, Mathew Carey, incoming correspondence, Vol. 1, Box 23, Folder 5. No. 190.

<sup>63</sup> Langdon Cheves to Mathew Carey, 14 April 1819, HSP, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection (227A), Series 5c, Carey Section, Mathew Carey, incoming correspondence, Vol. 1, Box 22, Folder 5, No. 49.

correspondence on the topic. The work was indeed relevant to American audiences, but perhaps not as wide an audience as Carey may have hoped.

The subscription registry included in the 1822 edition of the *Vindiciae* reveals that Carey had struck a chord with many Irish Americans. Unsurprisingly, even a cursory glimpse at the names on the list reveals an overwhelming Irish majority among the subscribers. Of the 472 people who paid for the work to be reprinted, a minimum of 340, or roughly 72%, had Irish surnames. The subscribers did not, however, represent an accurate cross section of American society.<sup>64</sup> Protestants, Irish or otherwise, were grossly underrepresented. Of the thirteen listed clergymen, for instance, only one, the Swedish Lutheran minister, Nicholas Collin, can be definitively identified as a Protestant.<sup>65</sup> At least eight of the remaining twelve were prominent Catholics, including three bishops, two of them Irish-born (Henry Convill, second bishop of Philadelphia, and John Connolly, second bishop of New York). First and second generation Catholic immigrants clearly recognized the utility of Carey's mission and proudly added their names to the document. In a way, the subscription list attached to the *Vindiciae* served the same function as a petition or public declaration. It testified, for all who cared to see, that those who paid for the reprint supported the restoration of Catholic Ireland's good reputation. For the Irish among them, the presence of their name on the list also served as a statement of national pride and a marker of their ethnic identity.

The impact of the *Vindiciae* resonated beyond Irish American circles. The work was respected for its depth of scholarship and the effectiveness of its argument.

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<sup>64</sup> Mathew Carey, *Vindiciae Hibernicae: or, Ireland Vindicated: An Attempt to Develop and Expose a Few of the Multifarious Errors and Falsehoods Respecting Ireland* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Philadelphia, 1822), v-vii.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Collin ministered to a diverse congregation at the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in the Southwark district of Philadelphia. His church was popular with poor Irish immigrants. McAleer, "In Defense of Civil Society," 192.

Both positive and negative references to the work appeared in published Federalist defenses of the Hartford Convention of 1814. One author wrote to a Boston newspaper attacking “compilers” who were “of a class who deny the pretensions of Clarendon, Temple, and Hume, to be considered as writers of authentic history.”<sup>66</sup> Such authors mislead readers regarding the intentions of the convention through their reliance on misrepresentative and insignificant sources. In a satisfying twist, another Federalist author and delegate to the Convention, Harrison Gray Otis, used the work to counter accusations that the meeting amounted to a secret cabal intent on dissolving the union. Such accusers, he claimed, could not be reasoned with: “and though even with the aid of Matthew [sic] Carey’s *Vindiciae*, it is impossible to refer them to the story of any false plot.”<sup>67</sup>

#### Carey and Irish history after the *Vindiciae*

While the *Vindiciae* served as a rallying point for middling Irish-American Catholics, it did little to change popular myths about Irish immigration. In this regard one of Carey’s primary objectives for writing the work was a failure. Social tensions arising from increased Catholic immigration and Protestant xenophobia in the years that followed the publication of the *Vindiciae* led Carey to return to the topic of Irish history. New social realities, however, dictated a change in tone in Carey’s subsequent publications on the subject. Popular Irish-American support for Daniel O’Connell’s campaign to repeal of the Penal Laws reinforced growing identification between Irish nationalism and Catholicism.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, Protestant resentment began to simmer to the surface in periodic bouts of anti-Catholic, anti-Irish violence, such as

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<sup>66</sup> *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, 19 Jan 1820.

<sup>67</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, *Otis’ Letters in Defence of the Hartford Convention and the People of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1824), iv.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, 168-169

the burning of St. Mary's Chapel in New York in 1831. While Protestant and Catholic unity held within the ranks of the Irish exile leadership, it appeared to have vanished entirely among working class immigrants. Worryingly, the ritualistic aspects of Ulster Protestant sectarianism were finding expression on the streets of American cities in the form of Orange Order marches and meetings.

In 1826, the Gideonite Society delivered an anti-Catholic address before a meeting of the Orange Order in Philadelphia. The event led Carey to publish a pamphlet entitled *Letters on Religious Persecution* in which he again attacked the Protestant mythology of seventeenth-century Ireland. On this occasion, however, Carey's aim was not to redress an imbalance in the telling of history or to seek a fair consensus as to what actually happened. It was to expose the "ruthless spirit with which the war was conducted" by successive Protestant governments throughout the 1640s and 50s.<sup>69</sup> This was a polemic not a history and Carey was on the attack. He was uncomfortable with the partisan line that his opponents had forced him to take. He asked his readers to remember that "the warfare" had been forced upon him "by the most wanton and unjustifiable attack of the Gideonite Order" and that nothing but "such a provocation" would have induced him "to take up the pen on a subject, which it were to be wished, for the honour of human nature, might be buried in eternal oblivion."<sup>70</sup> He capped his discussion of Protestant atrocity in his second letter with a description of Cromwell's massacre of the garrison of Drogheda in September 1649 where "six thousand men, [...] who surrendered on promise of their lives being spared, but were for five successive days butchered with the most unrelenting fury."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> [Mathew Carey] *Letters on Religious Persecution: Proving that that Most Heinous Crime has not Been Peculiar to Roman Catholics*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Philadelphia, 1829), 16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

Carey left it to his readers to decide to “whom the charge of murder and massacre most appropriately applies.”<sup>72</sup>

In his third letter Carey inverted the narrative of Rome’s persecution of Protestant heresy by exposing the numerous examples of Protestant intolerance found in the civil writings of early Protestant reformers. He listed remarks made by John Calvin, John Knox, Elizabeth I, and Philip Melancthon among others on the topic of the civil magistrate’s duty to expose and punish heresy. Like the Counter Reformation Church, the doctrines of the early reformers “do not merely palliate, but actually justify all the atrocities of that detestable establishment, the inquisition; and all the persecutions that have ever taken place.” Carey accepted that the Catholic Church had been guilty of violent intolerance in the past, but that it certainly did not hold a monopoly over atrocity in the name of faith.<sup>73</sup> All churches in that period, with the possible exception of the Quakers, endorsed the same bloody policy of violent persecution. Throughout the *Letters on Religious Persecution*, he maintained that his aim was to expose the hypocrisy of his bigoted opponents. It was, Carey claimed, to the shame of the Orangemen and Gideonites that they sought to drag the violence of past ages into the present. That such bullies claimed to be defending their country from Catholic influence by pointing to a litany of past Catholic atrocities made their campaign even more reprehensible.

In his analysis of the *Vindiciae*, Martin J. Burke observed that the work was “written for trans-Atlantic purposes, with trans-Atlantic audiences in mind.” It is certainly true that Carey intended it for European as well as American audiences and that he was disappointed that the work never received the exposure he felt it deserved in Britain and Ireland. Even if Carey’s primary intention in writing the *Vindiciae* had

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 20.



been to inform the Irish debate over Catholic emancipation, his preface to the work indicates that he was also deeply invested in the redemption of the Irish in America. As noble as Carey's attempt to provide a counter point to the histories of Temple or Hume was, in Ireland his endeavor never had the impact that he had intended and has since been subsumed within a large nationalist historiography. The significance of Carey's works on Irish history, especially the *Vindiciae*, lies not in the appeal that such works may have had among reformers and audiences across the Atlantic, but in the voice they gave to an increasingly marginal group within American society. As the subscription list to the second edition of the *Vindiciae* testifies, its publication marked the solidification of a nationalist consensus within a new self-consciously Catholic Irish America.