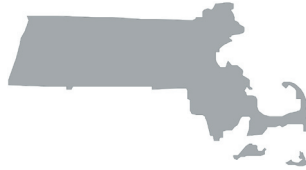


Patrick A. Collins, 1844-1905

Source: Walton Advertising and Printing Company, *Mayors of Boston: An Illustrated Epitome of Who the Mayors Have Been and What They Have Done*. (Boston: State Street Trust Company, 1914.)

Young Patrick A. Collins and Boston Politics after the Civil War

LAWRENCE W. KENNEDY



Abstract: *This article focuses on the involvement of the Irish in Boston politics during the first decades after the Civil War, a period when the Irish first began to organize and exert some political influence in the city. Irish community leaders cooperated with the Yankee leadership of the Democratic Party during these decades, receiving a certain amount of patronage in return and the nomination of several “respectable” Irishmen for political office. Although it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, after service in the U.S. Congress and diplomatic corps, that Patrick Andrew Collins was elected mayor (1902-05), his political significance dates back to the 1860s and 1870s. The article considers the nature of his leadership in that era.*

It was the Irish, notably ambitious young men like Patrick Collins, who made the two-party system viable in Massachusetts during the era of Reconstruction. As a young man, Collins joined the Fenian movement (founded to overthrow British rule in Ireland). This work led him into politics. He was quickly elected a state representative and then a state senator:

As a legislator, Collins worked to ease restrictions on the practice of religion for Catholics in state institutions and to earn public money for Catholic charitable institutions. With the rapidly increasing number of Irish voters in Boston in the 1870s, their vocal assertion of their rights, and strong political organization, the Irish were beginning to

be recognized as a power to be reckoned with. Collins was central to these developments.

Author Lawrence W. Kennedy is a professor at the University of Scranton. He has written extensively about the history of Boston and the Boston Irish.

Editor's Introduction: The Irish have played a defining role in Massachusetts history. According to the 2000 census, nearly 35 million Americans claimed Irish ancestry, almost nine times the population of Ireland itself. Nearly 25% of Massachusetts residents make this claim, the highest of any state and double the national average.

Why Boston? Historian James M. Bergquist writes, "If Baltimore was seen as a city dominated by Germans, Boston was clearly in the hands of the Irish. By 1855 about 30% of Boston's population was Irish-born, and only 1% German-born." In the early nineteenth century Boston had *not* been a prominent port of entry for European immigrants. However:

The famine years in the late 1840s brought large numbers of the most impoverished Irish to New England. Many of them had come by way of the Canadian maritime provinces or by way of New York. During the famine immigration, the poorest and most desperate Irish migrants came in the lumber ships to Saint John, New Brunswick, and then traveled down the coast to Boston and other cities. The lowly state of the Irish by the 1850s made them the special targets of nativist [anti-foreigner] attacks. The city served as a point of distribution for Irish immigrants going into interior New England, especially those who were becoming the workforce of the textile mills . . . But the lack of easy connections to the West (in comparison with other port cities) left many Irish stranded in Boston. The arrival of so many at mid-century crowded them into tenements, concentrated in the city's North End, with poor health conditions and high infant mortality.¹

* * * * *

¹ James M. Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1820-1870* (CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 168.

During the first decades after the Civil War, Irish voters played an increasingly important role in the local politics of Boston. Though they continued to experience poverty and discrimination, they began to establish themselves socially and economically. Not all Boston immigrants were poor and not all were Catholic or Irish; but in the middle of the nineteenth century, a huge gap existed between two identifiable groups that were competing in Boston politics: the native-born Americans and the mass of Irish immigrants. There were differences within each group, but there was a fundamental social, economic, religious, and political gap between the two populations.

Hostility towards those lumped together as “the Irish” was real. There were those, such as John Fitzpatrick, the Roman Catholic bishop of Boston during the Civil War, who attempted to ameliorate the conditions of the immigrant Irish community. Fitzpatrick advocated for his flock with the so-called Boston Brahmins — the city’s social, economic and political elite. At the time, to be Catholic in Boston generally meant to be Irish and vice versa. But with the end of the Civil War in 1865, Fitzpatrick’s death in 1866, and the passage of time, a new era emerged in the relationship between immigrant Irish and the city’s dominant native-born population. Irish leaders began to organize and exert influence in the city, cooperating with the Yankee elite of the Democratic Party. In return for this cooperation, the Irish received a certain amount of patronage and the nomination of several of their own for political office. More respectable sorts, like Bishop Fitzpatrick, were preferred. One of these “respectable” Irishmen was Patrick Andrew Collins (1844-1905). It was not until decades later that Collins was elected mayor of the city, but his political leadership in the years immediately after the Civil War was of great significance.

Oscar Handlin, in his classic study *Boston’s Immigrants*, wrote that, “The career of Patrick Collins illustrated the limitations of political leadership in this period.”² Geoffrey Blodgett observed of Collins that “he had risen easily above the image of the muddy-booted, clannish Irish roughneck that fixed itself in Yankee minds” and that “the ‘Paddy’ in him had almost disappeared by 1874.”³ More recently, Thomas H. O’Connor wrote of Collins: “In the seemingly endless struggle between the native and the newcomer, the Yankee and the Celt, the Protestant and the Catholic

² Oscar Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants, 1790-1880* Revised and Enlarged Edition (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 223.

³ Geoffrey Blodgett, *The Gentle Reformers: Massachusetts Democrats of the Cleveland Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 53-55.

that characterizes nineteenth-century Boston history, one man finally emerged as an acceptable representative for both sides.”⁴

Despite the acknowledged significance of Collins in Boston’s history, relatively little has been written about him. As a leading politician of Irish birth in Boston in the post-Civil War years, the story of Collins’ early political career can shed light on how even a “respectable” Irish politician could only accomplish so much in Boston during this time. The young Collins worked hard to advance the civil and legal rights of fellow Irish Catholics and effectively organized the local and state Democratic parties. In the process, he showed the possibilities and limits of electoral politics for an emerging immigrant group.

With their growing voting numbers, their increasingly vocal assertion of their rights, and their political organization, the Irish were earning a reputation as a power to be reckoned with. Collins’ significance lay in his ability to work with the established political leadership to secure advantages and relief for Irish Catholic residents of the city. As a state legislator, Collins worked to ease restrictions on the practice of religion for Catholics in state institutions and to secure public money for Catholic charitable institutions. Such political victories scored by Boston’s Irish on both the local and state level during the 1860s and 1870s were due, in some part, to Collins. He established himself as the central figure in much of the Irish story by his legislative leadership on Beacon Hill and in the local Democratic Party. Thus, a look at his early career can illuminate some of the problems and opportunities facing the diverse group of people commonly called the Boston Irish.

Collins was born in Ballinfauna, near Fermoy in County Cork on March 12, 1844.⁵ The story was told that the Irish national leader, Daniel O’Connell, prophesied upon seeing the baby that “one day he will be a great man.”⁶ After his father’s death during the Great Famine, Patrick and his mother joined the thousands bound for the United States and arrived in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in March of 1848 (from 1845-1852, approximately one million people died and a million more left Ireland). As a young immigrant in the Chelsea public schools, Collins experienced nativism first-hand. During a Know-Nothing disturbance in the 1850s, a

⁴ Thomas H. O’Connor briefly refers to Collins in many of his Boston histories such as *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995) and others cited below but it is a half a century since a dissertation was written on Collins. See Sister M. Jeanne d’Arc O’Hare C.S.J., “The Public Career of Patrick Andrew Collins,” (Ph.D. diss., Boston College), 1959.

⁵ O’Hare, p. 1.

⁶ Michael P. Curran, *Life of Patrick A. Collins: With Some of His Most Notable Addresses* (Norwood, MA.: The Norwood Press, 1906), p. 1.

rabble rouser called “Angel Gabriel” led a mob of several thousand to a Catholic church and tore the cross off the roof. In the ensuing weeks, nativists continued smashing the windows and doors of Catholic houses. Young Patrick was beaten and suffered a broken arm.⁷

Collins experienced better fortune when Robert Morris, the first black lawyer in Boston, took an interest in him and offered him a job as an office-boy. This allowed Collins to leave the fish and oyster dealer for whom he had worked.⁸ In 1857, the Collins family left Massachusetts to live for a few years in Ohio, where young Patrick worked as a laborer in the fields and coal mines. When the family returned to Boston in 1859, he became an apprentice upholsterer with F. M. Holmes and Company. By 1863, he was a foreman in the trade and founder of an upholsterers’ union. The family settled in South Boston, and Patrick was reported to have continued his education by walking a considerable distance to the Boston Public Library after work.⁹ In 1867, Collins began study in law with James M. Keith, a prominent Democrat, to prepare for a career in politics.¹⁰

In their comprehensive account of Massachusetts history, Richard D. Brown and Jack Tager contend that the Democratic Party was in absolute shambles at this time.¹¹ Dale Baum, a leading scholar of Massachusetts politics of the era, asserts that the party never recovered from the earlier debates over slavery; and that by the time the Civil War was over, it had become identified with disloyalty, secession, and anti-black prejudice.¹²

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3,12. The “Know Nothing” Party was a nativist American political movement of the 1840s and 1850s. It was empowered by popular fears that the country was being overwhelmed by Irish Catholic immigrants, who were often regarded as hostile to U.S. values and controlled by the Pope in Rome. The party strove to curb immigration and naturalization, though its efforts met with little success. The origin of the “Know Nothing” term was in the party’s semi-secret organization. When a member was asked about its activities, he was supposed to reply, “I know nothing.” See Dale Baum, “Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 64 (1977), pp. 959-86; Steven Taylor, “Progressive Nativism: The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Vol. 28 (2000), pp. 167-85 and John Mulhern, “Western Massachusetts in the Know-Nothing Years: An Analysis of Voting Patterns,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Vol. 8 (1980), pp. 14-25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13. For more on Robert Morris, see William Leonard, “Black and Irish Relations in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Interesting Case of Lawyer Robert Morris,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 37 (Spring 2009), pp. 64-85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹ Richard D. Brown and Jack Tager, *Massachusetts: A Concise History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), p. 217.

¹² Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 108. See also Brian Kelly, “Ambiguous Loyalties: The Boston Irish, Slavery, and the Civil War,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 24 (Summer 1996), pp. 165-204.

It survived during the succeeding decades due in great part to the Irish vote. It was, in fact, the Irish who made the two-party system viable in Massachusetts in the decades following the Civil War. It was not inevitable that the Irish would continue to support the Democratic Party during Reconstruction. Patrick Collins is a crucial part of the explanation for why they did so.

Many Irish Catholic voters supported the Democratic Party as an alternative to the Republican Party, which they continued to see as anti-Irish and anti-Catholic. Clearly a factor in this affinity was the *Pilot*, founded as a Catholic newspaper in 1829. In the post-Civil War years, it continued to urge loyalty to the Democratic Party. In the Congressional elections of 1866, for example, it urged Irish immigrants to naturalize and advised readers to vote against the Republicans, “the sectarian Protestant party.”¹³ The *Pilot* also claimed that the Radical Republicans possessed a “bloodthirsty and vindictive spirit towards the South.”¹⁴

Despite the *Pilot*'s views, there were Massachusetts Republicans who sought Fenian and Irish-American support. Fenianism was an Irish nationalist movement that advocated the use of physical force to gain Ireland's independence in Britain. The Fenian Brotherhood was founded in 1858 in New York City and by 1865 the movement had attracted 250,000 followers, many of them Civil War veterans. Fenian leaders hoped to benefit from Anglo-American conflict by attacking Canada but the movement was severely weakened by factionalism.¹⁵ The resulting Fenian invasions of Canada, then British North America, in 1866 and 1870 were thwarted by internal divisions, as well as by British and American forces. Simultaneous Fenian revolts in Ireland were no more successful.¹⁶ The Fenians were readily identified with violence but Republican Senator Henry Wilson addressed a Fenian picnic in 1866 and quoted a definition of the movement as being for “the cause of liberty everywhere.” He then said, “Well if that be Fenianism, then I am a Fenian.”¹⁷ Ben Butler, at this time a Radical Republican, was another politician who courted the Irish vote. Butler, who represented an Essex County congressional district, offered a resolution expressing sympathy for the Fenians and advocating an anti-British foreign policy.

¹³ *Pilot*, September 15, 1866.

¹⁴ *Pilot*, November 3, 1866.

¹⁵ Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish* (New York: Longman, 2000), p. 128

¹⁶ Liz Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to Partition* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994), pp. 66-68.

¹⁷ Dale Baum, “The ‘Irish Vote’ and Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1860-1876,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 26 No. 2 (June 1980): p. 131.

Despite the appeals by Wilson, Butler, and others, the fact was that the Republican Party also stood for much that alienated the Irish in Boston. This made the party's quest for votes more difficult and also made the work of Collins and other Democratic Party organizers easier. The Radical Republicans of the era felt that if post-war change heightened problems and threatened the tranquility of the Bay State "then proper liquor laws, literacy tests for voting and the agency of the public school would somehow maintain the social unity of the Commonwealth."¹⁸ Such issues long divided Massachusetts voters and clearly limited Republican appeal for the great number of Irish voters in Boston.

In particular, the Republican Party's support of temperance efforts alienated many Irish voters in Boston. State prohibition had been in effect since 1855 and continued to be a controversial issue. Reformers, upset at the lack of enforcement of liquor laws by Boston officials, wanted to create a metropolitan police force. Republican governor John Andrews set up a state-wide constabulary in 1865 instead of a metropolitan force, thus creating the first state police force in the country.¹⁹ Governor Andrews intended to appease the temperance agitators and in this he succeeded: the following year, nearly half of all court prosecutions in the state were for cases involving liquor nuisances.²⁰ This was a pleasing statistic in the eyes of temperance advocates, but it was not a record that sat well with the urban Irish voter.

It is interesting to note that some years later, Collins, acting as a pragmatic leader, urged that the Democrats forget the prohibition issue. He conceded that there were Democrats who thought the party existed only to fight against prohibition, but he argued that the party should quit discussing "this miserable liquor law" and get on with other matters such as how to organize the vote.²¹ Given this stance, it is not surprising that Collins was far more concerned with restrictions on exercising the franchise. His concern was shared by the long-established voice of the Catholic Irish community, the *Pilot*. The proposed literacy test for voting was something the *Pilot* had long deplored as a ploy to keep the Irish out of the polls.

In 1866, however, the *Pilot* changed its editorial policy and came out in support of literacy requirements. During Reconstruction, when the literacy

¹⁸ Richard H. Abbott, "Massachusetts: Maintaining Hegemony," in *Radical Republicans in the North: State politics during Reconstruction*, ed. James C. Mohr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8. This legislation created the first state police force in the country.

²⁰ Edith Ware, *Political Opinion in Massachusetts during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, 1917), p. 182.

²¹ *Pilot*, February 7, 1874.

test was being used in Southern states to deny former slaves the vote, the *Pilot* now claimed that the literacy test “establishes what is known as intelligent suffrage . . . and it would act as an incentive for those who desire the franchise to obtain an education.”²² The target here was clearly the newly enfranchised black voter. Ironically (and sadly) the paper lauded the proposed national Literacy Test as “in fact, the Massachusetts suffrage system,” although it had so often deplored this system when it was targeted against the Irish.

The Republican Party continued to woo Irish voters but its efforts were weakened by the fact that the party was joined by other societies and organizations that sprang up to fight the Irish Catholic presence in the Bay State. In 1873, the *Pilot* claimed that Boston’s City Hall was “a nest of these conspirators.”²³ In 1877, it asserted that the Order of American Mechanics, “a nefarious organization,” controlled the superior officers of the Boston Police Department and committed injustices upon foreign-born policemen.²⁴ The secrecy of these anti-Catholic nativist groups mirrored the secrecy of organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Molly Maguires, and the Fenians, all of which attracted an Irish-Catholic membership. In retrospect, it seems remarkable that in the fall of 1864 young Patrick Collins joined the South Boston Fenian Circle, along with Hugh O’Brien, another Irishman who would become mayor of Boston.²⁵ Fenianism was more widespread than generally known. It was popular among Irish Americans and Collins was no half-hearted recruit. In January 1865, he was a delegate to the Irish Republican Brotherhood’s Second Annual Congress, and the next month he undertook a full-time recruiting job for the movement. He traveled extensively throughout New England and worked out of the New York headquarters. However, Collins apparently became disillusioned after sixteen months of this work and returned to Boston and his old job as foreman in a furniture warehouse.²⁶

The failed Fenian invasions of Canada (1866-71) had a strong impact on Collins’ political evolution. For the youthful, yet decidedly pragmatic Collins, the unsuccessful raids were an indication that another course was

²² *Pilot*, December 1, 1866.

²³ *Pilot*, May 24, 1873.

²⁴ *Pilot*, February 3, 1877.

²⁵ O’Hare, p. 38. Hugh O’Brien (1827–1895) was the 31st mayor of Boston, from 1884-1888. O’Brien is notable as Boston’s first Irish mayor, having immigrated from Ireland in the early 1830s.

²⁶ O’Hare, pp. 38-64.

CONTRASTED FACES.

“Look on this picture, and then on that.”—SHAKESPEARE.



Fig. 747. — FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.



Fig. 748.—BRIDGET McBRUISER.

Anglo-Saxon maidenhood (Florence Nightingale) meets Irish Depravity (Bridget McBruiser). Originally published in 1866 (New York) by Samuel R. Well in his purportedly scientific *New Physiognomy; or Signs of Character Manifested through Temperament and External Forms*.

Reprinted in Kevin Kenny's fascinating study, "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 90 (June 2003), pp. 134-62.

needed.²⁷ Revolutionary force was acceptable in Ireland but not in North America. In Collins' conception, the future belonged to electoral politics. Although he would always speak proudly of his Irish heritage and later assumed a major position in the Irish-nationalist cause, from this time on, he focused on his own path to progress within the mainstream of American party politics.

This organizing experience as an Irish nationalist provided Patrick Collins with a solid political education even as he moved steadily into the world of ballot box politics. In the fall of 1867, he took a decisive step in

²⁷ On June 1, 1866 an estimated 1,000 to 1,300 Fenians crossed the Niagara River into Canada in the first raid. Editor's note: Several Canadian museums offer exhibits and displays on the raids, which strained U.S.-Canadian relations for decades.

his subsequent career when he “accidentally strolled into the Democratic caucus in South Boston.”²⁸ Collins, the former Fenian recruiter, union organizer, and well-known orator, was invited to speak to the gathering. His remarks were received so well that he not only won a great round of applause but was elected a delegate to the Democratic State Convention. He was nominated for state representative from the district several months later at another caucus meeting. He won that election and the following year was re-elected to the State House.

Patrick Collins never lacked ambition. When he saw leadership opportunities, he seized them. While a state representative, Collins, along with Thomas Gargan, organized a meeting of like-minded young Irish partisans at Boston’s Parker House Hotel. Thus was born the Young Men’s Democratic Club and Collins was elected its first president. The club’s rally at Faneuil Hall on October 20, 1868 included “prominent Brahmin Democrats” such as John Quincy Adams and William Gaston, giving “public evidence of the new coalition between the Yankees and the Celts.”²⁹ Having forsaken Irish revolutionary activity as fruitless, Collins plunged headlong into American electoral politics.

Thus, at the young age of twenty-five, Collins was already a prominent local political figure, though a member of both a minority group and a minority party. In 1869, Collins was one of only nineteen Democrats who served in the Massachusetts House.³⁰ In later years he claimed that he had intended to go to Germany to study law but was persuaded to remain in Boston and run for the state senate in 1869.³¹ Collins was the youngest state senator up to that time and was also the only Irish American senator in the first of his two terms.³² While serving in the Senate he continued his legal studies at Harvard Law School and earned his degree in 1871.³³ Collins then passed the bar and left the state legislature to practice law.

As a legislator, State Representative Patrick Collins’ main achievement was to remove obstacles facing his co-religionists in the practice of their faith. Discrimination against the Irish continued in the post-Civil War years. For example, the Massachusetts General Hospital resisted admitting Irish people to its wards in the 1860s.³⁴ Some progress in eliminating

²⁸ Curran, pp. 32-33.

²⁹ O’Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), p. 161.

³⁰ O’Hare, pp. 89-91.

³¹ *Memorials of Patrick A. Collins 1844 to 1905*, 25, Rare Books Room, Boston Public Library.

³² O’Hare, p. 98.

³³ Thomas H. O’Connor, *Eminent Bostonians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 69.

³⁴ Morris J. Vogel, “Patrons, Practitioners, and Patients: The Voluntary Hospital in Mid-Victorian

discrimination had already been made in the 1860s. Local historian Dale Baum points out that “the Radicals in the legislature removed from the state constitution the so-called two-year amendment, which had placed restrictions on immigrant voting, and revoked the law making Bible reading compulsory in public schools.”³⁵ But in the Bay State Irish Catholics were still not treated equally.

Collins’ first legislative battle was in 1868 when the Hibernian Benevolent Society applied to the legislature for a charter. Richard Henry Dana, representative from Cambridge and author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, led the opposition to this group, even though it requested no state funds. Collins’ leadership and rhetoric were credited with changing sufficient votes to win a charter for the Society.³⁶ Not a spectacular accomplishment, but a start.

The next year, Collins was confronted with a greater task, that of seeking public money for a Catholic benevolent organization. The House of the Guardian Angel applied to the legislature for the sort of financial assistance that was routinely granted to non-Catholic charitable institutions. This time, however, through Collins’ efforts, a Catholic group was granted \$2,000.³⁷ Furthermore, in both 1870 and 1871, the House of the Guardian Angel grant was increased to \$3,500. In addition, another Roman Catholic charitable group, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, received \$10,000 in 1870 to assist them in building facilities for those they served. This was, however, a brief victory for Catholics; it didn’t take long for protesters to rise up against this use of public money. The Board of State Charities started issuing annual reports warning against this practice, and after three such reports, in 1872, the legislature accepted its view and stopped the policy of providing grants to all charitable religious institutions, Catholic and Protestant alike. It was the poor who suffered, regardless of religious affiliation.

A more generally insulting law that applied only to Catholics was the special oath they were required to take in court proceedings. Rather than merely raising their hands and swearing they would tell the truth, Catholics were forced to place their hand on the Bible and then kiss it

Boston,” in *Victorian America*, ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), p. 128.

³⁵ Dale Baum, “Woman Suffrage and the ‘Chinese Question’: The Limits of Radical Republicanism in Massachusetts, 1865-1876,” *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (1983), p. 62.

³⁶ O’Hare, p. 85.

³⁷ Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston: In the Various Stages of its Development 1604-1943*, Vol. 3 (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1944), pp. 68-69.

after completing the oath. According to one source, the Irish “resented the implication that Catholics were not trustworthy and could not be believed if sworn according to the usual form.”³⁸ State Representative Patrick A. Collins introduced a bill to change this legal requirement in 1869, but it failed. The law requiring this special oath was not repealed until 1873, after Collins had left office.

While still a legislator, Collins had voiced discontent at the treatment of Catholics in state penal and charitable institutions and claimed that he could cite numerous examples of bigotry in the management of such establishments. He complained about the lack of visits by Catholic priests to inmates, though he failed to gain even the right for priests to say mass in the institutions.³⁹ The time was not propitious for such concessions to Catholics. As John Higham wrote in his classic study, *Strangers in the Land*:

After the Civil War religious forces never recovered the commanding influence which they had exerted throughout the culture of earlier decades. The Protestant crusade against Rome never again dominated nativist thought as completely as it had in mid-century. But anti-Catholicism was far from dead, and in the 1870s it flared up in several northern states.⁴⁰

Massachusetts was among these states. Catholics who contended they sought respect for their religious liberty and conscience were met with comments such as the following by a Protestant minister in Boston in 1870:

The conscience of the Romanist is not entitled to consideration, because his conscience is founded not on his own reason or on the Bible, but on the traditions of men, decisions of Councils, and the will of the Popes, and no more entitled to respect than that of pagans and idolators.⁴¹

³⁸ Sister M. Jeanne d’Arc O’Hare, op. cit., pp. 94-95. She cites the *Pilot*, May 15, 1869.

³⁹ O’Hare, 96-101; Curran, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁰ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955, 1988, 1992), p. 28.

⁴¹ Lord, Sexton, and Harrington, p. 78. See Lawrence Kennedy, “Pulpits and Politics: Anti-Catholicism in Boston in the 1880s and 1890s,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 28 (Winter 2000), pp. 56-75.

The state did ultimately allow Roman Catholic masses in penal institutions. Senator M. J. Flatley led a successful campaign for fuller religious liberty for Catholics in state prisons, and in 1879, this religious freedom was extended to charitable and reformatory institutions as well. Priests could now enter these places, although no Roman Catholic chaplains staffed either state or local institutions. Catholic inmates were still required to attend Protestant services in Boston until 1883, as a matter of discipline, and Catholic leaders were chagrined that Catholic inmates often failed to attend mass in order to have some time for recreation.⁴² Again, Collins did not succeed in winning the fight, but he did play a significant part in eliminating discrimination. He, along with others, sought not only to ameliorate the conditions facing poor immigrants but also to make the Irish more attractive to native-born Americans. Throughout these early years in his career, Collins pursued all these endeavors.

Henry Livingston Richards, a convert to Catholicism who was born of Yankee stock, deplored the fact that “it should have taken so many years of unwearied, patient labor” to “persuade these liberal descendants of the old Puritans to be consistent with their own principles” and grant freedom of religious worship.⁴³ It was not, however, appeals to traditional principles but the increased number of Irish voters in Boston in the 1870s that brought about the change in the state institutions. This population increase was a reality that young Patrick Collins sought to exploit. He was, of course, not alone in recognizing the possibilities.

The increase in Irish numbers at this time relative to the Yankee population seemed so great to the *Pilot* that it portended the day when “the last descendant of the Puritans would be exhibited in a glass case at the United States Patent Office as a national curiosity.”⁴⁴ Leaving aside such acerbic remarks, there is no question that the voting power of the growing Irish population is crucial to the story of Boston. According to Paul Kleppner, by the late 1870s, Boston had become one of the nation’s “most reliably Democratic bailiwicks.”⁴⁵ The problem was to reap rewards by exercising power and securing group interests. As a legislator, Collins recognized the need for organizing the latent power of the Irish in Boston

⁴² James J. Bric, S.J., “An Account of Catholicity in the Public Institutions of Boston,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, I (1884-1886), p. 162.

⁴³ Joseph Haven Richards, S.J., *A Loyal Life: A Biography of Henry Livingston Richards* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1913), p. 330.

⁴⁴ *Pilot*, April 27, 1872.

⁴⁵ Paul Kleppner, “From Party to Factions: The Dissolution of Boston’s Majority Party, 1876-1908,” in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 111.

in order to provide muscle for the legislative battles. Early in the 1870s, he bemoaned the fact that “the population of Boston is Democratic but its rule is Republican.”⁴⁶ He was concerned with both grassroots organization and state-wide participation of the Irish and he devoted himself to this task but, naturally, not all Irish voted Democratic.

In 1872, for example, a group of Irish Republicans held meetings at their club at 221 Washington Street in Boston. Pierce A. Doherty presided over the meeting at which these Irish-Americans endorsed the nomination of President Grant.⁴⁷ The Irish in Boston were too diverse to be of one mind about anything, but Collins brought considerable energy and organizational ability to the task of strengthening the Democratic Party and the Irish-American community in Boston. The results were evident as Catholics started winning more political offices.

The first Catholic had served on Boston’s Common Council in 1857, and by 1870, there were six Irishmen there.⁴⁸ In 1870, Bostonians elected the first Catholic alderman who, over the next few years, was joined by others. Hugh O’Brien was first elected to the Board of Aldermen in 1875 and served as chairman of this board. The police force, too, saw increased numbers of Irishmen and by 1870 there were forty-five Irish officers.⁴⁹ Collins himself served in no municipal office until the beginning of the twentieth century but was instrumental in laying the groundwork for this Irish ascent to power. Collins was elected to the Democratic City Committee in 1873 and soon became its chairman.⁵⁰ Collins led the way as the Democrats created a new local party structure, composed of a Boston Central Committee with elected delegates from each ward. Elected president of this group, he continually argued that party fidelity was the key to electoral success.

Collins led like-minded politicians into state politics in the 1870s, forming an organization known as the “Young Democracy.” Collins and his associates sought a partnership with state Democrats and worked hard to win Boston Mayor William Gaston the Democratic nomination for

⁴⁶ *Pilot*, February 7, 1874.

⁴⁷ *Boston Globe*, August 31, 1872. Henry Wilson, of Natick, Massachusetts, a one-time member of the Know-Nothing Party and a founder of the Republican Party who served in Congress, was Grant’s running mate.

⁴⁸ Lord, Sexton, and Harrington, pp. 85-6, and Thomas H. O’Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston*, 3rd rev. ed. (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1991), p. 155.

⁴⁹ O’Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses*, 155. Before the Civil War, the only Irishman on the police force was Barney McGinniskin.

⁵⁰ O’Hare, p. 112.

governor in 1873.⁵¹ Gaston defeated Democratic rival Leverett Saltonstall but lost the final election to the incumbent Republican Governor Washburn. In Boston, however, Samuel C. Cobb, a Democrat, ran and won the mayor's race, though on a non-partisan basis. This was an extraordinary election: Cobb won nearly all the votes due to the devastation of the Great Fire the year before. The problems facing the city were so severe that Boston's political leaders temporarily adopted a bi-partisan approach to city government.

Cobb won three terms as Boston's mayor and the challenges of the Great Fire of 1872 were met, but it would be too much to expect all political conflict to disappear. When it came to choosing a bi-partisan slate for the Board of Aldermen, the collaborating party leaders agreed that half of the new aldermen were to be Democrat and the other half Republican. Under Collins' leadership, however, the Democrats passed an amending motion to exclude any candidate from the joint Republican-Democratic selection who favored exclusion of the immigrant or belonged to any organization so committed.⁵² He made sure the local party did not ignore its immigrant base and the Irish sensitivity to discrimination.

Collins, a steadfast Democrat, believed the party to be one of principle. In an 1874 appeal to voters, he refused to allow poor prospects for electoral success to deter the party from nominating candidates for offices. He declared: "We are Democrats not because we are successful, but because we believe we are right."⁵³ The Democrats were clearly not always principled and were, in fact, sometimes successful: in 1874 the Democrats won the governor's seat for the first time since the Civil War.

Patrick A. Collins was a key leader in this 1874 campaign on behalf of William Gaston. Collins correctly identified what was to be the main campaign issue: denouncing "the prohibitionist cabal" which dominated the state. Lieutenant Governor Thomas Talbot, running on both the Republican and Prohibitionist tickets, lost the election as a wave of anti-prohibition sentiment swept the state.⁵⁴ Collins was also pleased to note that the majority of Congressmen elected from Massachusetts were Democrats. Privately, the election also meant something to Collins; Governor Gaston rewarded him by appointing him the Judge Advocate of the state militia.⁵⁵ More significantly, despite the fact that the Republicans still controlled the

⁵¹ Baum, *Civil War Party System*, p. 186.

⁵² *Boston Globe*, December 4, 1873.

⁵³ *Pilot*, February 7, 1874.

⁵⁴ Baum, *Civil War Party System*, p. 191.

⁵⁵ Curran, pp. 36-37. Thereafter, Collins was called General, although his friend, secretary, and biographer, Curran, claimed Collins disliked the title.

legislature, the prohibition law of 1855 was repealed and a local option law was enacted.⁵⁶

Collins' attention and ambitions were steadily moving from local politics to the state and national levels, with mixed results. Governor Gaston lost his re-election campaign in 1875 as the Republicans reasserted their traditional dominance in the state. The next year saw more Republican victories. This was, of course, the derided and disputed election of 1876, which led to the end of Reconstruction. Collins's political significance was acknowledged when he was selected as one of the four Massachusetts delegates to travel to the 1876 Democratic national convention that gave the presidential nomination to Governor Samuel J. Tilden of New York.

Back in Massachusetts, Gaston, who hoped to regain the governor's seat, and again had Collins' support, was forced to withdraw. Gaston was pushed out of the race by party chiefs who believed that placing the illustrious name of Charles Francis Adams at the head of the state Democratic ticket would ensure support for Tilden. This nomination posed a dilemma for Collins, as he and most Irish-American leaders opposed Adams because of his record as ambassador to Britain during the Fenian crisis.⁵⁷ Collins and the Irish generally felt that Adams' indifference to the plight of Irish-American prisoners captured in the failed invasions of Canada was indefensible. In 1867 Collins had given a stirring denunciation of Adams "who bears a name immortalized in '76 but disgraced in '67."⁵⁸ In 1876, however, Collins came under considerable pressure from other party leaders to support Adams and finally did so. At this point Collins clearly decided to shed his old nationalist sentiment and instead adopted the position that Irish politics were foreign and of secondary importance.⁵⁹ This became a key moment and turning point in Collins' political career and ideological evolution.

In the service of party unity and Adams' campaign, Collins gave what is considered the most famous speech of his life in Marlboro, Massachusetts, on September 14, 1876. In this speech, Collins argued against the notion of being a "hyphenated American."⁶⁰ He also dismissed the Fenian issue by claiming the prisoners would have suffered no matter who the American minister to England had been. Collins argued that there was a new agitation and concluded that, "In this fight Charles Francis Adams is with us. That is

⁵⁶ Weeks, p. 600.

⁵⁷ Curran, p. 41.

⁵⁸ O'Hare, p. 86.

⁵⁹ Brown and Tager, p. 219.

⁶⁰ Curran, p. 42.

enough for me.”⁶¹ These sentiments were clearly a long way from those of the Fenian recruiter of a decade earlier. Like other Irish politicians, Collins eventually opted for the ballot rather than the bullet. He gained a great deal of national attention as he carried his message throughout New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Ohio.⁶²

According to the Patrick Collins of 1876, issues of corruption, extravagance, taxation, and prosperity were now more important than Irish nationalism. As Walter A. MacDougall writes in *Throes of Democracy*, “In 1876 Americans celebrated their centennial year by staging a thoroughly corrupt presidential election between two parties running against corruption.”⁶³ MacDougall noted that Republicans clearly

distracted Northern voters from substantive issues by whipping up anti-Catholic hysteria. Nothing proved the Civil War era was ending more than this reprise of the Know-Nothing’s agenda. Protestant leaders insisted that the Pope, whom the Vatican Council of 1871 had pronounced infallible on matters of faith and morals, meant to indoctrinate American children and subvert the republic.⁶⁴

In the context of the era’s anti-Catholicism, it is not surprising that, despite all of Collins’ exertions, Massachusetts Democrats lost on both the national and state levels. Ironically, Charles F. Adams, whose name was supposed to aid the party, was not only defeated, but trailed Tilden, the man he was supposed to help, by 4,000 votes.⁶⁵ Adams’s defeat could not be laid at the feet of the Irish, however, as Collins’s oratorical efforts paid off in the Bay State where the Irish maintained their traditional party allegiance. It was clear to many observers that the Irish vote in 1876 was kept in line by Boston Irish leaders such as Patrick Collins.⁶⁶

Although a year of national Democratic defeat, historian Dale Baum argues that 1876 marked the revival of the Democratic Party in

⁶¹ Patrick A. Collins, *Charles Francis Adams as Minister to England and an Anti-Know-Nothing* (Boston: Post Publishing Company, 1876), p. 9. This pamphlet, the text of Collins’ stump speech, was printed and given wide circulation as a campaign weapon of the Democratic Party.

⁶² O’Hare, p. 45.

⁶³ McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era, 1829-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 531.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Baum, *Civil War Party System*, pp. 205-207.

⁶⁶ Baum, “The Irish Vote in Party Politics,” pp. 138-9.

Massachusetts.⁶⁷ This development was especially significant to the Irish. Although they were unquestionably Democratic and of real importance to the party, they were not represented in its leadership ranks in proportion to their actual numbers.⁶⁸ In 1877, the *Pilot* deplored the fact that only two of forty state senators and thirteen out of 240 representatives were Irish. The paper quoted a journal that said that much of the blame for this state of under-representation lay with the Irish themselves, as they lacked enough regard for each other and failed to cooperate in politics: “We quarrel about the crumbs while our enemies run off with the big loaf.”⁶⁹ Irish factionalism would endure as a factor in Boston politics, but it is not the full explanation for the continued lack of political success for those of Irish birth or heritage.

One problem that Collins and other Democratic leaders had to contend with was that some Irish voters continued to support the controversial Massachusetts Representative and Radical Republican Benjamin Butler. Described as “a shrewd and brazen opportunist,” Butler began his career in Lowell as a Democrat, became a Unionist, and then a Republican before championing the Greenback cause and finally returning to the Democratic Party.⁷⁰ The Irish had long admired Butler for his anti-English and pro-Irish stands. Butler’s power and his election to the governorship in the 1880s was made possible by new conditions in the state. By the late 1870s, the emotionalism of the Civil War politics had given way to a new type of politics. In Massachusetts the decade saw the rise of professionally managed politics.⁷¹ The Republicans, although still the majority party, had, like the Democrats, been weakened by intra-party disputes and were also bereft of a sense of mission.

The Democrats, on the other hand, offered new opportunities, and Butler was the man to seize them. But when Butler assumed control of the state in 1883, he awarded most of the patronage to political cronies who were Yankee and ex-Republican.⁷² Naturally, this angered the Boston Irish leaders who expected to share in the fruits of victory. Collins unenthusiastically supported the controversial politician after Butler was

⁶⁷ Baum, “The Massachusetts Voter: Party Loyalty in the Gilded Age 1872-1896,” in *Massachusetts in the Gilded Age: Selected Essays*, ed. Jack Tager and John Ifkovic (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 48.

⁶⁸ Baum, *Civil War Party System*, p. 109.

⁶⁹ *Pilot*, February 3, 1877.

⁷⁰ Brown and Tager, p. 228.

⁷¹ Baum, *Civil War Party System*, pp. 206 and 210.

⁷² Richard Hammond, “Tradition and Change in the Gilded Age: A Political History of Massachusetts, 1878-1893” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), p. 185.

elected governor in 1883; but when Butler decided to run for the presidency on the Greenback ticket the following year, Collins was glad to see him leave the party once again.⁷³ The Butlerite chairman of the Democratic State Committee was forced to resign his post in July of 1884, and the ever-ready Collins was appointed his replacement.⁷⁴

By aligning themselves with Butler, an outsider to the Massachusetts establishment, the Irish had once again damaged their standing in the respectable community. Despite the best efforts of Patrick Collins, a significant percentage of Irish voters had identified themselves with a figure whom the Boston Brahmin elite perceived as a disruptive force who threatened the social, economic, and political fabric of the Commonwealth. Facts such as Butler's nomination as the regular candidate of the Democratic Party in 1883, and the relatively low level of Irish support for his presidential bid in 1884, could hardly alter the fundamental perception of an alignment of Irish forces behind the man considered by Boston Brahmins to be a demagogic figure. Whatever the realities regarding Butler's influence on the Irish masses, these negative Yankee perceptions were harmful to the ambitious, respectability-seeking Irish, notably Patrick Collins.

Though outside the realm of Boston politics, one other potentially contradictory aspect of Collins' career needs to be analyzed: his brief but important role as an Irish-American nationalist leader in the 1880s. As nationalism and agrarian demonstrations were exploding in Ireland, American Irish leaders such as Collins became involved in the struggle. Collins was elected president of the American Land League at the first national convention of this conservative Irish nationalist group in 1880.⁷⁵ The group, which was formed to coordinate with the efforts of the Land League in Ireland, raised some \$400,000 in its first year under Collins' direction. In his efforts on behalf of the Land League, Collins was considered by some to be more effective than any other speaker, except for the great parliamentary leader Charles Parnell.⁷⁶ But while the Irish question remained significant in Boston politics, Collins' part in the struggle lessened.⁷⁷ As he had done earlier, he turned once again to elective office. In 1883, Collins began the first of three terms as the U.S. Representative for the newly drawn Fourth District of Massachusetts. Collins had been

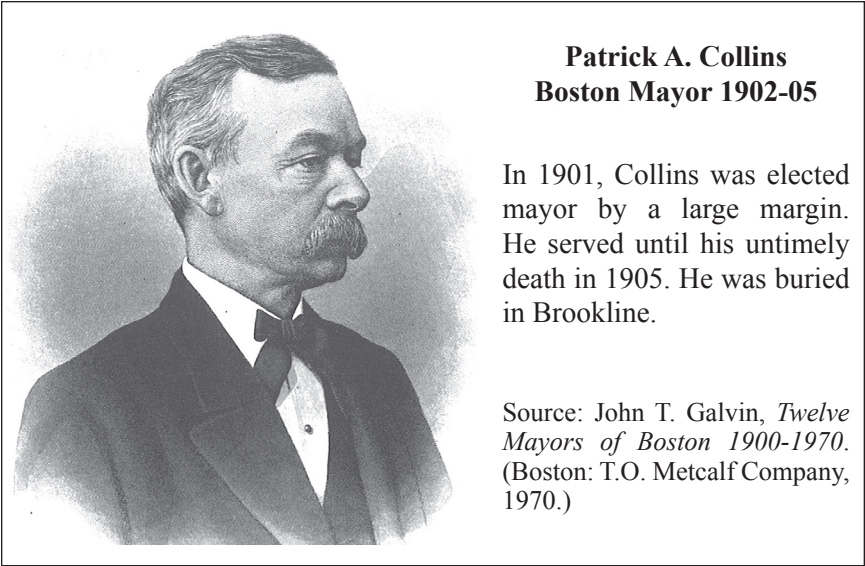
⁷³ Blodgett, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁴ Harmond, pp. 187-192.

⁷⁵ Curran, p. 59.

⁷⁶ *Collins Memorials*, p. 94.

⁷⁷ For more on this see Lawrence W. Kennedy, "The Irish Question and Boston Politics," pp. 124-142 in *Boston's Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O'Connor*, ed. James M. O'Toole and David Quigley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).



mentioned for a congressional seat as early as 1878, but not until after the 1880 redistricting did his election to this office become a reality.⁷⁸

This service in Washington in the mid-1880s began the second half of Collins' career and is beyond the scope of this account, but a summary provides some perspective. Collins served in the U.S. House of Representatives until 1889. His congressional career and campaign efforts led to his appointment as the U.S. consul in London in the 1890s. Collins, the poor Irish refugee who had left his native land in the Great Famine a half-century earlier, was now a U.S. government official in the great imperial capital. The post, Collins' reward for his electoral support of Grover Cleveland's 1892 campaign, allowed him to earn "a substantial income from fees, contracts and licenses."⁷⁹ Once his term as consul general was completed, Collins re-crossed the Atlantic to Boston and returned to electoral politics in Boston by running for mayor in 1899. Although he lost, he won on his second try in 1901. Collins was re-elected in 1903 and died in office in 1905.

James J. Connolly, in his study of early twentieth-century Boston, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, offers a brief assessment of Collins' mayoralty:

⁷⁸ Curran, p. 68.

⁷⁹ O'Connor, *Eminent Bostonians*, p. 70.

By most accounts, Boston had entered the new century as one of the nation's best-governed cities. The reforms of the 1880s, the social welfare experimentation of Mayor Josiah Quincy in the 1890s, and the abstemious political practices of Irish mayor Patrick Collins contributed to Boston's reputation for good government and relatively clean politics.⁸⁰

The merits of his work as mayor are beyond the scope of this article but Patrick A. Collins' significance in Boston's history is not determined just by his brief mayoralty. In fact, his mayoralty came years after he made local politics subsidiary to his involvement in state and national campaigns. His term as mayor is a distinctly separate portion of his involvement in Boston politics, and his election was the result of very different forces in 1901 from those at the time he first was a key political organizer for members of Boston's Irish immigrant community. In the years immediately after the Civil War, the Boston Irish community needed leadership, energy, and respectability. Young Patrick Collins provided all three.

⁸⁰ James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 41.