Gangsters have a special place in Hollywood. Romanticized or not, their allure of secrecy creates a mythos around that obscures historical fact. Especially for 19th century gangs such as the Bowery Boys, modern knowledge rests on a precarious jumble of hearsay and legend. *Gangs of New York* may have been faithful to historical New York City, but the average Bowery Boy was no Daniel Day Lewis. Reconstructing a historically sound idea of who the Bowery Boys were in their native time and place would have been difficult, even for someone as prominent as Bill “the Butcher” Poole, the founder of the gang. But for the true everyman, an illiterate foot soldier among their ranks, information was practically nonexistent. I had to create my own chain of information where none existed, based on the resources I had available.

I began with Fondren’s America’s Historical Newspapers database. The article I started with was with a single paragraph from the *New York Times* on a shooting, so I reasoned other local newspapers would have their own reports that I could piece together for a more complete understanding of the incident. Through the database, I found two more articles that added more detail from other perspectives. They also included biographical information, which opened up the doors I needed to find out more. I could narrow down the correct Redmond McManus from the 1900 census, which allowed me to find him in 20th century employment records and city directories from New York City.

After establishing a baseline of data, I searched for more general information on the different demographics Redmond McManus represented. Using the Electronic Enlightenment database, I found the correspondence of 19th century Irish immigrants in New York City. They described their personalized experiences moving to different world, adding a dimension of emotion not present in impersonal records. Using JSTOR, I found journals and other secondary
sources to reconstruct what a picture of life for people like Redmond McManus might have looked like. Slowly, I began to understand who he was beyond his identity as a member of the infamous Bowery Boys.

It is no strange thing, then, that the Bowery Boys were known for leading very ordinary lives in conjunction with their more illicit activity. Men like Redmond McManus were family men and working men, living their own lives without being defined by the gang. Even under the united banner of nativism, they represented disparate groups. Through my research, I was able to distance my understanding of Redmond McManus from the media’s. Rebuilding him through letters and journals allowed me to see further into who he really was. It turns out that gangsters do deserve their special place in Hollywood, because their lives are as layered as any story should, though they end up at a tragic ending more often than most.