Fondren Library Research Award

Redmond McManus:

A Biographical Portfolio

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to pick someone in history who would have been overlooked by history and reconstruct their lives through an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Even if the person had left no records specific to himself, more general research based on the kind of person he was would reveal the necessary information to gain a full understanding. The person in question was a 19th century Irish immigrant gangster in New York City named Redmond McManus. He was responsible for an accidental shooting in 1861, but there is little further information. Most significantly, he was a member of the Bowery Boys, a powerful Nativist gang. The gang itself is famous because of its media representations, but specific historical information is limited. Now, after over a century, it is difficult to separate fact from legend. Though they occupied a significant place in New York City’s political development, they managed to keep their secrets well hidden. Based on census and employment records, other news reports, letters, and secondary sources, a complete picture of his life could be created, focusing on the more personal aspects of the life of a Bowery Boy.
Manhattan – Redmond McManus, 86, died Sunday, June 8, 1908 at his home on 152 Walker following a brief illness. He leaves his wife of over 50 years, Alice McManus; his son, Redmond, Jr; and his two daughters, Regina and Adelaid. Born and raised in New York City, the son of Irish immigrants, he was a lifelong resident of the Five Points neighborhood in New York. Throughout his early years, Mr. McManus had several jobs around the Five Points, most notably as a deputy sheriff for the City of New York. He was also very active in local government, and he could often be seen drumming up support to get out the vote. His closest friends say he is dearly missed, and that “the ol’ gang just won’t be the same anymore.” A funeral service will be held this Sunday at the Church of the Transfiguration on 29 Mott this Sunday afternoon.
A Letter Home in the Voice of Redmond McManus

April 7, 1861 [8]

Dear Mother,

I hope my letter finds you in good Health. God knows the weather here in York is still bitter Cold even if it is only April. Me and Alice [1] are making it through the Year, even if she is still not used to how the Weather gets. I’ve been meaning to see you and Father, but Money has been hard to come by of late. The Americans don’t want to hire Irish even if I was born here and I've managed to lose the job I had with the Junkstore owner.

Even so, Mother, my friends in the Bowery helped me find work with the Sheriff. Here they select workers just as they pick out Beasts at the market in the Old Country, or as they do for the Army. Just as long as they are strong and healthy, they work. That is how they Deal with people. But it is true, that if one is young, healthy, and has the desire for it, then he can make a decent Living, but he also has to know how to speak American. One can make a Dollar here much faster than one would be able to make a half a Dollar in an entire summer in the Ireland you were born in. [23] It is still slow going, because I do not know the Language half again as well as I should, and that is Important for everyone. But I have the desire and can Afford to be strong and energetic.

It also pays to have friends in High Places, and I’ve made friends with the Highest of them all. We’ve taken to calling ourselves the Bowery Boys. We’ve made ourselves into a Volunteer fire department, though we always keep on the lookout for some other group trying to do the same in places under our Protection. We fight for each other when needs be and look out for each other in more ways besides. [10] America is the richest country in the World, and work
is hard everywhere because of it. But we can live without any hesitation and can make a life for ourselves more quickly here than anywhere else.

I must confess, Mother, that I write to you from a spot of trouble I’m finding myself in. I was at the Branch Hotel saloon with a couple of the boys when we got to talking about Guns. I was only demonstrating but my shot hit a man and killed him. I meant no such harm but it seems the papers are calling it a murder in Cold Blood without provocation. [16] I write to assure you that it was no such thing. I was arrested and taken to the Station, but the boys tell me not to worry about how everything will end up. They can be very persuasive if needs be so I should be back on my feet in no time. This certainly won’t be the first time the Bowery Boys have used our Influence to get things moving our way. [11]

So do not worry about me. I ask that you keep me and my family in your Prayers, Mother, and I shall try and do the same. Once this whole mess is sorted out, we’ll all visit. Now I go no further and must break off this Letter. With a greeting to Father and the same to all other relatives and friends, Live well, and if we are not fortunate enough to see one another more in this World, may we all meet and go forward Gladly to the next. Write us and tell of yourselves. Alice and the children join with me in sending our love and hopes you will forgive our neglect in our slowness in answering your welcome Letters.

Best,

Redmond
Annotated Bibliography


Contains a thorough census record of Redmond Mcmanus shortly before his death. The source provides key information about his family, place of residence, birthdate, and birthplace. McManus had a long-lasting marriage and two daughters, Regina and Adelaide, despite the problems in his life as seen in the news article. Although the record has the validity that comes from being a government-run survey, there is room for false or incorrectly remembered information. However, the source is still useful to create a biographical context from which to construct an idea of what his day-to-day life must have been like.

* Household ID: 84; Publication Number: T623; Page: 4B; Line Number: 75; Microfilm Number: 1241062; Image number: 00849.


This book is an informal history of crime in the Five Points, meaning that it is not afraid to use legend to exaggerate and flesh out a literary representation of the neighborhood. The author does not make anything up, but many of the anecdotes and facts are based on the mythos of the gangs. Even so, the source effectively places the reader in the historic Five Points, allowing a deeper and more complete understanding of the environment.
from which the Bowery Boys acted in 19th century New York. This selection of the book focused on the taverns and brothels that defined the Bowery, as told by visitors in their writing. Asbury quotes Dickens to create a literary visual of what the neighborhood might have looked like at the time Redmond McManus would have lived there. The description also spoke to the lifestyle that characterized McManus and other poor, Irish immigrants.


This song describes the Dead Rabbits’ Riot, a two-day, 1000-man riot that escalated into a full-scale war with the police. At one point, the Dead Rabbits and the Bowery Boys had a temporary truce to barricade the riot zone against the police before resuming the battle. It drew in non-gang members and caused untold property damage. The song describes the action, providing details like dress and bystander sentiment that don’t appear in news reports of the riot. The source effectively painted a picture of what the riot would have sounded and felt like, a much richer understanding than objective reporting could have provided. The source helped reconstruct the kind of gang atmosphere Redmond McManus would have been part of, albeit to an extreme.

This collection shows, through primary source analysis, the role of the Irish in New York. It documents the public sentiment understanding of the Five Points neighborhood as an area of “casual violence, carousing, and open love-making” (112), and that the rise of violence in Manhattan was clearly related to the rise of the Irish population in the Five Points. The source spoke to Redmond McManus’s status as an immigrant because it shows the inbetween status that Irish immigrants had in New York. The Irish were both directly and indirectly forced to live in Five Points, and because of this, they were blamed for most of Manhattan’s overall violence. New York City high society bordered the poor areas of the city, and in doing so, it created the idea of the immoral, violent, and “un-American” lifestyle of Irish immigrants in the Five Points neighborhood as well as the rest of New York City.


Presents a stylized depiction of a Bowery Boy gang member in a woodcut engraving. For the Bowery Boys, clothing was so important that the typical outfit became almost a uniform. In the engraving, the subject has his hair slicked into a forelock with pomade, and cut short in the back. He wears a “stovepipe” top hat made from beaver fur, a cravat tied around his neck, a red shirt, a frock coat, black flared trousers with the cuffs rolled up, and high-heeled black boots. In the midst of the poverty experienced by most immigrants in the Five Points, the Bowery Boys would have been a striking contrast with their emphasis on fashion, a choice that also speaks to their flamboyance as a criminal
gang. The image creates a possible image of what Redmond McManus might have looked like.

I chose this primary source as one of my most important pieces of evidence because it captures the essence of what a Bowery Boy looked like. Facts and anecdotes are all well and good, but I only really began to consolidate what I know about Redmond McManus after I saw this source. From my background knowledge of the Bowery Boys gang, I was also able to evaluate my preconceptions from pop culture depictions of the Five Points like the one in *Gangs of New York*. The source helped me understand that the Bowery Boys really were every bit as flamboyant as their mythos made them out to be, but that they were still real historical figures grounded in the social and fashion norms of antebellum New York.


This image captures a specific moment during the New York City draft riots, in which Irish immigrants went on a fighting and looting spree in response to the Civil War draft. An easy target for the largely uneducated Irish immigrants was the pro-war newspapers. The New York *Tribune* was an especially contentious target, and fighting exploded at the printing office. The police led a concentrated charge to try to cut off the worst of the fighting. As a formative moment that put the issue of Irish immigrant violence on the forefront of many New Yorkers’ minds, the Draft Riots would have had personal significance for Redmond McManus, who might not have served in the Civil War, but
would have seen friends and family affected by often unethical draft processes. This source effectively established a background to understand the riot in that context.

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This editorial captured the nativist sentiment against Irish American immigrants in New Yorck City. Nativism guided the actions of many New York City gangs, including the Bowery Boys. Even though Redmond McManus was of Irish descent, he was born and raised in America, which explains how he could be part of groups like the Bowery Boys. Nativism was tied to the assumption that the Irish immigrants were to blame for systemic problems among the poor of New York. The sentiment expanded to encompass temperance and anti-immigration as well. As both a political and personal philosophy, nativism’s greatest strength was in government, and Bowery Boy members would organize (often through intimidation and other less legal means) to ensure friendly politicians would win. Redmond McManus would have lived and worked as part of this political system.

This letter back home captured the experience of being a fresh Irish immigrant to New York. Whereas it was not unheard of for immigrants from other countries to be wealthy and well-educated, creating a skilled artisan class in the US, most Irish immigrants were poor and uneducated. They would come to New York City with the American dream in mind, only to find strong Nativism that would have stacked the odds against them.

Perhaps this is why McManus’s parents chose not to stay in the United States, leaving Redmond McManus on his own. He made a life for himself, but it was separate from his Irish identity. The difficulties expressed in this source help understand why McManus ended up, as he did, in a Nativist gang like the Bowery Boys.


An Irishman tries to explain why Irish immigrants commit so many crimes in the Five Points. In the most notorious neighborhood in New York, the majority of crimes were committed by Irish immigrants. The writer of the letter explains that compared to the Americans living there, Irish immigrants in the Five Points were, on the whole, uneducated and/or disgraced back in Ireland. And because the city they fled to was mostly unwelcoming, there was more crime in the Five Points than in all of Ireland. This source helps understand what Redmond McManus’s environment must have been like. His crime would not have been unusual, especially given his membership in the Bowery Boys gang and the rampant presence of alcohol and other such vices on every street in the Five Points.

Provides the details of the shooting of William “Buffalo Bill” Poole, the founder of the Bowery Boys gang. Much like in Redmond McManus’s shooting of the man named Hogan, Poole was killed in a drunken altercation. However, Poole’s life and death were colored by his larger-than-life reputation. Though much of the story of his death was dramatized, the context of his death was very typical for the poor of the Five Points. Theaters with alcohol were everywhere, and a common social activity was to see a play and drink. Brawls and riots were commonplace, and grudges were not easily forgotten.

I chose this secondary source as one of my most important pieces of evidence because it was much more narrative than the others. It consolidated its own bibliography of sources to create its story. This technique made the event vividly real in my mind, which helped me paint a picture of how Redmond McManus must have shot Hogan. The author also emphasized the Bowery Boys’ propensity to fight based on their personalities. The story centered the drama of life in the Five Points in historical fact. It consolidats a complete narrative from which Redmond McManus’s can be extrapolated and compared to Poole’s.
This book compiles pictures of the Irish in America. It examines their lives and their struggles living in tenement houses in the ghetto. It also looks at their successes in politics, sports, and entertainment. It has extensive political cartoons, photographs of political figures, and descriptions of the types of occupations the Irish were employed in. It is a pictorial history of the Irish that details the legacy they left for future generations. The book’s descriptions of political machines is especially relevant to Redmond McManus, because he was a deputy sheriff and a gang member representing such a machine.

This image uses Thanksgiving Day to highlight class divide in New York City. It shows two house cross-sections side by side, of a poor family and a rich family. “Those who have more dinners than appetite” represent the American aristocracy. Poor immigrants (represented by the opposite side) harbored a lot of resentment for the people they felt were stacking the odds against them, contributing to a strong sense of Irish nationalism. This nationalism encouraged immigrants to band together and live in the same area, which developed the Five Points as an Irish immigrant neighborhood. This geographical
and demographic context would have shaped Redmond McManus’s development, leading up to the shooting incident.


This image is an artist’s representation of the abysmal living conditions in the Five Points. When the landfill was neglected in the 1820’s the wood frame houses began to collapse. It became infested with immorality and disease. Those who couldn’t get out fell victim to political machines and crime. Redmond McManus was one of the poor immigrants who made these living conditions his home. These conditions guided the formation of violent gangs, who built their power off of the rampant drinking, gambling, and prostitution in the neighborhood. In this source, a wooden house is shown, almost collapsing into the streets. Even houses like these would have been further partitioned to make room for more people, exacerbating the living situation for families like McManus’s.


This letter home from 23-year-old Margaret McCarthy described the opportunities and difficulties that Irish immigrants faced in America. McCarthy sailed from Liverpool on
the *Columbus* on September 7, 1849, and arrived in New York on October 22nd that same year. She urges her family to join her and provides detailed advice for doing so. She emphasizes that most migrants do not bring enough to go inland, so they are stuck in the cities, creating competition for labor that leaves everyone poor. Redmond McManus had great difficulty keeping a job, which was a product of this situation.

I chose this primary source as one of my most important pieces of evidence because the letter illustrates how less-educated Irish immigrants would have spoken and wrote, a key part of their identities in America. Furthermore, it provided key information on the Irish immigrant experience from a first person account. McCarthy’s struggles echo and reveal McManus’s for further analysis. More than the others, this letter was most analogous to Redmond McManus’s life.


This song is from the end of Redmond McManus’s life, and shows that even as nativists like the Know-Nothings were losing their political clout, anti-immigration discrimination was still significant. The song became immensely popular despite its message. It takes on an almost fatherly tone, warning immigrants to knuckle down and follow the rules because America had accepted them so gratefully. This sentiment manifested itself in discriminatory practices like the infamous “No Irish Need Apply” signs. Redmond
McManus shuffled jobs a good deal during his life. Being of Irish descent with an Irish name, it would have been more difficult for him to find a job, which would explain why he never seemed to have the same job in any two records.


This source reports on the shooting of a man named by Hogan by Redmond McManus. The article is little more than a stub, providing only superficial details about time and location, but it identifies McManus as a “Bowery Boy”. It also points out that McManus shot Hogan “without the slightest provocation.” This detail sheds light on McManus’s character and the Bowery Boys as a whole. The source is physical proof of the incident in question and also provides further context in the form of a brief article on a vote for officers of the Brooklyn Library Mercantile Association below.


Provides an account of all civil employees of the city of New York in 1861. Redmond McManus is listed as a Deputy Sheriff stationed on 11 City Hall under the Sheriff’s office. Because of the variety of jobs that McManus had at different points in his life, this source effectively confirms his occupation at the time of the shooting. The fact that he is a police officer says a great deal about the state of corruption and government
inefficiency in the slums of New York with high influxes of immigrants. However, the source does not specify until when McManus remained a deputy sheriff.


This excerpt details the visit of the Ladies’ Home Missionary Society to a poor family in the Five Points. The description is very romanticized and idealized, emphasizing the difficulties of the family in question in an almost patronizingly sympathetic way. Nevertheless, the description of their hardships would not have been out of place for an Irish immigrant family in the Five Points. Living with a wife and two daughters, Redmond McManus would have had similar struggles maintaining his family, especially because of his seeming lack of ability to hold a job long enough. Research more clearly reveals his motivations for joining and staying with the Bowery Boys gang under this context.


In this source, a Protestant missionary visits the Five Points on the Sabbath and is shocked to see what he finds. All the businesses are open, especially those establishments
centered on alcohol and prostitution. Not only does the article demonstrate the morality of the Five Points but it also paints an economic picture of the neighborhood as well. The prominence of taverns and saloons, or even just theaters and other business where alcohol could be purchased, guided the culture of the poorer demographics in the Five Points. Redmond McManus was involved in this culture, as evidenced by the reports surrounding the shooting. It helps understand how everyday life might have played out, guided as it was by violence and drinking.


This news report is another take on the shooting. Unlike the other *New York Times* source published two days earlier, this article is based on the police report has more pertinent detail. The earlier article said Hogan was instantly killed, but he actually ended up surviving after the bullet was removed from his head. This source has the same location for the saloon, No.36 Bowery, as the earlier article. It goes in detain as to the background of the shooting, establishing that the shooting was intentional, but hitting a person was not. McManus was trying to hit a gas-light in a drunken bet. This source was useful for establishing what kind of person McManus was, because it was more personal than objective reporting. It also helps explain why McManus did not face any lasting consequences for shooting Hogan.

This article was a third take on the shooting. Unlike the *New York Times* articles, this one had a different address and a different establishment for the location of the incident. In terms of level of detail, it was in between the other two. A marked difference was an opinion statement at the very end of the segment, which said that anyone who did what McManus had done could only have been “a naturally vicious person or a confirmed loafer.” In understanding who McManus was, this statement could be taken as a serious gauge of his character, which would not be out of line given the recklessness of his actions. On the other hand, it could be biased from the perspective of a slightly better off reporter, in which case it could be interpreted from the lens of class differences. Either way, considering the source against others yields a richer understanding of what the event says about Redmond McManus’s character.


This source is the very personal diary observations of a New York Nativist. Marked by crude stereotypes and a distinctly angry tone, the entries reveal the Nativist mindset against Irish immigrants to New York City. While the diary does discuss actual violent events and immoral behavior tied to the Irish, it is more significant in revealing the underlying philosophy of groups like the Bowery Boys. Gang riots broke out between immigrants and Nativist groups because of such polarizing hatred as expressed in the diary. While McManus was of Irish descent, he clearly subscribed to the Bowery Boys’
philosophy as a staunch member. He resolved this dissonance of identity by choosing one side, and this source effectively shows how his mindset might have looked.


This letter is a long, discursive description of what it is like for immigrants to find work and become members of their new communities in America. Interestingly, the writer focuses less on his own experience and more on a generalization of Irish immigrants as a whole. Unthank discusses rent prices and the typical wages for unskilled labor. He also makes reference to the underlying tension between immigrants and blacks over access to jobs. This source creates an economic context for Redmond McManus’s immigrant experience in the Five Points. The racial issue was also important to the Bowery Boys gang, which McManus represented.

U. S. Commissioner-General Of Immigration. ... Immigration figures for 1903. From data furnished by the Commissioner-General of immigration. Comparison of the fiscal years ending June 30, 1902 and 1903. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. ***

This source provided a general overview of immigration to the United States over the 20th century. By focusing on 1902 and 1903, the Immigration Restriction League uses statistics to highlight key issues they have with the increase in immigration. The general statement on the second page summarizes the data to say that immigration (not just from Ireland) was largely unsuccessful and unwanted in the United States. The numbers show
most immigrants were poor and ended up returning home if not living in poverty in America, mostly along the eastern seaboard. The source provides a background of understanding Redmond McManus’s family background as they moved to the United States. Being exposed to such unfavorable conditions would have affected McManus’s development into the Bowery Boy he would eventually become.

Link to Source Portfolio:

https://drive.google.com/a/rice.edu/file/d/0BwsO35DmCus3T1JvcTNxREll2c/view?usp=sharing