

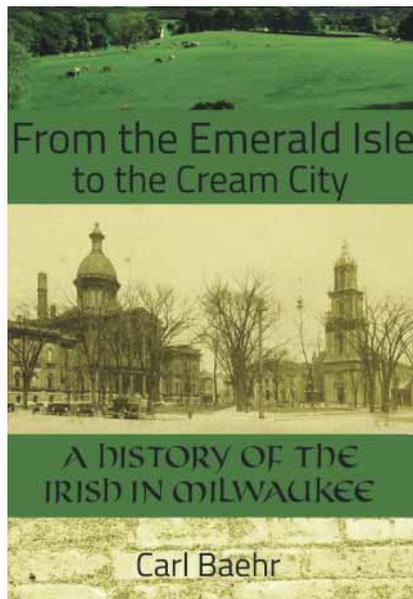
From the Emerald Isle to the Cream City

A History of the Irish in Milwaukee

By Joe Grandinetti

There is a substantial amount of historical, and potentially genealogical, material in Carl Baehr's latest literary work published and released by Everything Goes Media in November 2018. The book is a well-organized review of Irish contributions, involvement, and influence in Milwaukee. Incidentally, the "Cream City" moniker is a reference to the pale yellowish color of area clay used in brickmaking, and abundantly evident in the city's older buildings.

The author begins with the 1835 – 1839 period, then divides the chapters into decades from the 1840s though 1890s for the real "meat and potatoes" of the book and wraps up with a section devoted to 1900 through the present. We're told that Milwaukee's early Irish were mainly comprised of "two classes" of Irish Catholics that started arriving in the 1830s. The larger crowd were working-class peasants from the poorest rural areas of Ireland. In the minority were middle-class professionals, tradespeople, and larger-scale farmers. A relatively small number of Protestants were also in the mix. Insight is given on the push/pull factors leading all groups to leave/come, the patterns of chain migration, and the ensuing tight-knit enclaves that



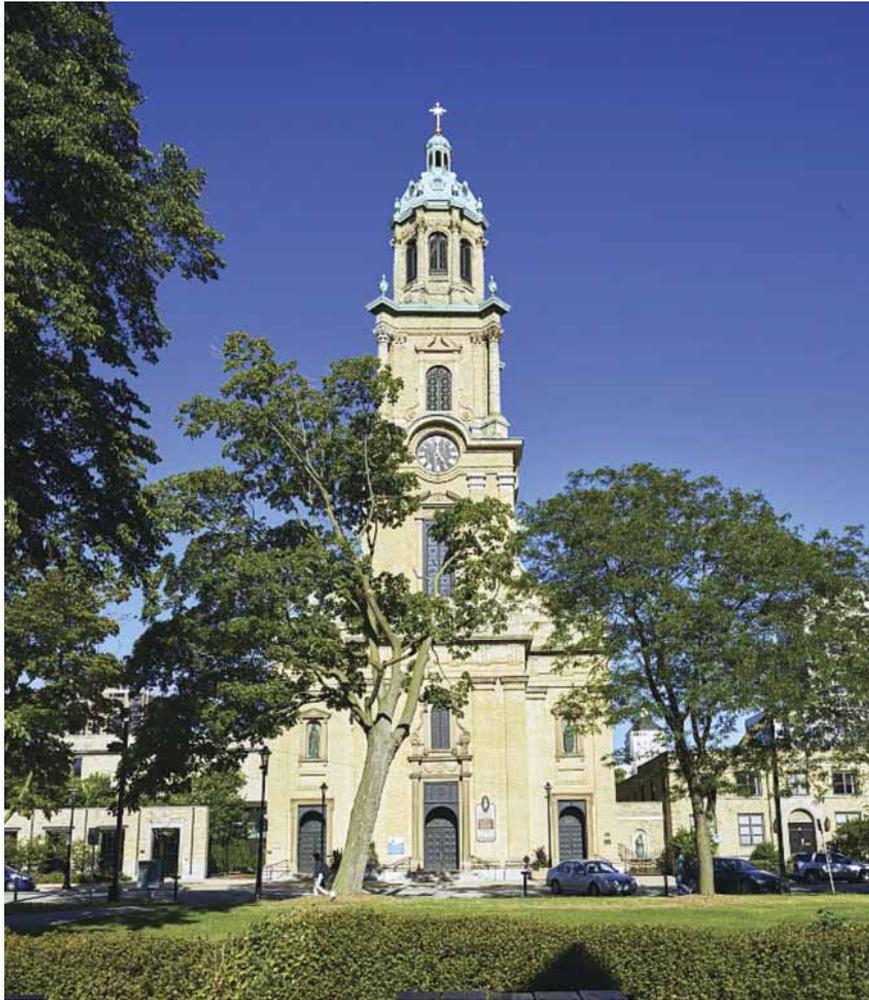
The book is available at Amazon.com:
<https://www.amazon.com/Emerald-Isle-Cream-City-Milwaukee/dp/1893121399>

formed within the city.

There was particularly enlightening material on the Civil War period. The prevailing sentiments in Wisconsin were soundly aligned with the Union cause; however, many Milwaukee Irish weren't – initially. Ultra-competitive labor markets fueled a fear that an end to slavery would translate into lost work. The state's native-born population believed a swift Union victory was imminent, without need for foreign-born Irish soldiers. The expected speedy triumph wasn't to be and Irish

recruits were eventually welcomed into Wisconsin's growing regiments. In turn, a sense of patriotism washed over these fighting sons of Erin, who now had a "chance to excel in the face of Yankee prejudice and prove themselves loyal citizens." The atrocious divisive war actually facilitated Irish acceptance and acclimation. This is an example of countless interesting topics covered in the book. There is ample reference to Milwaukee's historically Irish neighborhoods that sheltered the immigrants, buffered inter-community contact, and fostered assimilation. As posterity departed the microcosms, direct ties to Ireland were fading fast by the 1930s. However, the book encouragingly reported the resurgence of Irish cultural identity in the prosperity of post WWII years and enhanced by John F. Kennedy's presidency.

I had the pleasure to speak with author Carl Baehr. He's a devoted native Milwaukeean and prolific writer on his city's past. Carl had a long career in the IT industry, worked as a library director, and then spent a decade as a professional genealogist. As for his own ancestry, he proudly proclaims DNA testing results of more than 90% Irish composition (the Baehr surname carried



The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee. Completed in 1852 and constructed with distinctive Cream City brick, it was the first "Irish Church". (Wikimedia Commons)

from his great grandfather who was adopted into a German family). The book is the culmination of 20 years of tedious accumulation alongside Carl's historical and genealogical research projects. He modestly inserted just a fleeting mention of his forebears, dropping in a few family surnames while referencing some popular last names in Hibernian Milwaukee. Instead of the book being a personal family history, he opted to make it a communal one. It's an interwoven patchwork of people and place, heavy laden with context. The stories of folks and their local distinction are often dovetailed into the broader national

settings (both American and Irish).

The author mentioned the following as significant and/or area-unique tidbits and resources used in his research:

- The 1866 Fenian Invasion of Canada and the Milwaukee Irish connection therein.
- The *Afterword* details many Irish who are memorialized in Milwaukee's local place names.
- *Appendix 1* - Discusses the U.S. Census data of the mid-late 1800s undercounting the Irish. Important for Irish origins seekers - the 1860 U.S. Census for Milwaukee's 4th Ward lists the specific county of birth in Ireland for most immigrant residents.

- The sinking of the *Lady Elgin* in 1860 - a devastating event for Milwaukee's Irish. *Appendix 2* is a list of the deceased, compiled by the author.
- St. John the Evangelist Cathedral became Milwaukee's "Irish Church". Baptism, marriage, and death records from the mid 1800s through the early 1900s are online at www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/665983.
- Check out the Irish Genealogical Society of Wisconsin at www.igswonline.com. They have a dedicated staff, various pertinent collections/databases, and an "Irish Emigration Library".

If you have Emerald Isle ancestors who ventured to, or through, the Cream City in the past 180 years, you'll want to read this book. Even if your clan aren't specifically mentioned in print amid the many, many individuals who are, the book offers thorough perspective on the social, economic, political, and religious conditions they likely encountered. The tales of those unnamed and/or unfamed are told vicariously via Carl's narratives on the collective circumstances of the early generations of Milwaukee Irish. ☒☒



JOE GRANDINETTI

is a CPA and an avid family historian. His genealogical interests include his paternal

ancestry in Calabria, Italy, and his maternal Irish lines from Ardara, county Donegal, and Keeloges East, county Galway. He is a member of the Northeast Pennsylvania Genealogical and Luzerne County Historical Societies. He resides in Mountain Top, Pennsylvania with his wife and children.