

Preface

Tom Kinney's *Irish Settlers of Fitchburg* defies most stereotypes about local history, which is usually so narrowly defined as to discourage interest beyond closely defined borders, and also about its authors, who generally hover on the downhill side of retirement. In Tom's case, age thirty lies somewhere on the horizon; he wrote this work during a summer vacation from law school and in off-moments while working at a job between undergraduate and graduate schools.

As for content, *Irish Settlers of Fitchburg* reaches well beyond the confines of its title to illuminate county-wide and statewide issues of interest—just as good local history should. Tom Kinney even has provided some details that should interest the Irish-American community nationally.

To give a county and state example, his discussion of territorial and early statehood roads and transportation routes helps clarify the story for much of southern Wisconsin. As revealed by Tom Kinney, these territorial routes were transient and highly flexible, responding to geography and changing again and again over a period of only twenty years, quite unlike modern hard-surfaced highways and streets. Yet, despite these characteristics, roadways controlled development, giving rise to Dane County hamlets which have virtually faded from both the landscape and memory.

Other issues he touches upon beyond the immediate tale of the immigrant include: the contrasts between governmental and natural boundaries; the rapidity of change during Wisconsin's earliest years; the discontinuous nature of neighborhoods and ethnic enclaves; the impact on agriculture of a large nearby city like Madison; and the interaction of private and public institutions.

But Tom Kinney does not ignore his primary goal: to give the Irish of Fitchburg their due. Compared to Dane County's German and Norwegian immigrant communities, historians

have neglected the Irish, not to mention other English-speaking immigrant groups. Kinney has begun to remedy this situation. His affection and respect for his Irish ancestors and their neighbors shine through every page.

Madison's development inexorably is erasing "old" Fitchburg, but this young author has made sure that it will not be forgotten. He has searched out vestiges of roadbeds and mine shafts, has tramped the fields, woods, and marshes. He has talked to old-timers and farmers and housewives and teachers. He has combed archives, libraries, and courthouses. In the process he has learned more about old Fitchburg than anyone else now knows. And he has taken the trouble to put his findings into print. Let us hope that he will continue to refine his research and continue to share his findings and thoughts about Fitchburg well past retirement age nearly two-score years from now.

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