Preface

During the first half of the nineteenth century an unprecedented number of peasants left their European homelands, crossed the Atlantic, and settled in North America. These people came from various parts of western Europe, but in all this massive flow the southern Irish were the largest ethnic or cultural group. Celtic and Catholic, they were largely a rural, pre-industrial people. Although the vast majority of the southern Irish opted for city life in North America, many settled in rural areas, particularly in eastern Canada or British North America as it was then called. While something of the community of Irish life may have been more readily reproduced in an urban setting than it was in the relative isolation of the North American farm lot, the immigrants continued their age-old occupation on the farm and could transfer and adapt there a wider range of the material folk culture and settlement morphology of their homeland.

This study attempts to assess the extent to which aspects of Irish material folk tradition and settlement morphology were retained, were modified, or were lost in a rural setting in the New World. Three small pockets of rural Irish settlement — in Peterborough, south-central Ontario; in Miramichi, northeast New Brunswick; and in the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland — are selected for analysis. The material folk culture and morphology of settlement in each of these pockets are described in detail and compared to homeland forms. The author's boyhood in rural Ireland, his work as an undergraduate in historical geography at University College, Dublin, his MA thesis there on the evolution of the cultural landscape in County Galway and his close acquaintance with the current research on Irish folk life, formed an indispensable background for this study.

Research in the three study areas depended on both archival and field investigation. Material of a quantitative nature, not obtainable in the field, was

available in the archives. Census data giving the numbers of immigrants, their areas of origin, their destinations, their age-sex ratios, their marital status, their religions, their past occupations and dates of entry, and details of their agricultural practices during the early decades of occupancy in the New World form the documentary base of this book. Special government reports on pioneer agriculture and on pre-migration conditions in Ireland and the public and private papers of persons officially connected with Irish immigration and settlement in the study areas proved particularly useful sources of information. Local courthouse records supplied data on individual land grants, sales, wills, and litigation over ownership, as well as cadastral maps of initial and subsequent settlement. Local sources such as church archives yielded genealogical data to supplement those already acquired in the field; local newspapers, old diaries, and other private accounts, travellers' sketches, and even outdated local histories furnished much needed information.

The bulk of this work, however, is based on field inquiry. Any study which has as its focus the reconstruction of the cultural landscape requires extensive field traverse. Two types of information were collected in the field: the first based on personal interviews, the second on observation of the cultural landscape.

Interviews were conducted mainly among older male residents in the study areas. Questions were usually confined to the history of an informant's farm. The lack of mobility, especially among the Irish in the Newfoundland and New Brunswick settlements, often meant that the informant's grandfather or great-grandfather had first settled on the farm and that the informant himself had acquired it through his own father and had worked it for a lifetime. This stability greatly enhanced the informant's interest in, and knowledge of, the family farm, for he often possessed not only information personally gleaned during his late nineteenth-century boyhood but an oral tradition that often extended back to the initial occupancy stage. A distinction has been made between phenomena actually observed by informants, which are part of the living or folk memory, and information transmitted orally to informants by persons no longer alive, which constitutes the oral or folk tradition.

Approximately one hundred full interviews were conducted in the three areas of Irish settlement and at least as many more persons were called upon to verify some of the material collected from the principal informants. A full interview involved the completion of the basic questionnaire, recording all the items of settlement being studied for at least one farm. The more willing or more reliable informants were visited several times and questioned about contiguous or relatives' farms. In this way the number of farms described in field notes exceeded the number of informants. Wherever possible, an investigation of the farm was made after each interview to inspect and sometimes to photograph pertinent items of material culture and settlement. Many of the sketches in this book are based on these photographs.

There are some terms in this work which are widely used by geographers in Britain but have never gained currency on this side of the Atlantic. Gaelic terms are also frequently employed. All of these terms are explained on first usage and are collected in a glossary at the end of the book.

My deepest debt is to the cordial countrymen whose grandparents and great-grandparents form the subject of this study. These Irish-Canadians shared fully in my interest in their ancestors and antecedents and displayed great patience and understanding with my countless questions. Field rapport was easily gained and as an "old country" Irishman I was welcomed warmly. It is axiomatic that this study could not have been produced without them. Space does not permit a full list of informants but I deem it necessary to mention here at least two informants whose contributions were outstanding: Simon O'Connell of Peterborough and Aly O'Brien of St John's.

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