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Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah

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Construction of the Central Railroad was a turning point in the history of Savannah. The port had already lost retail trade to towns of the expanding upland cotton region, and in 1833 its river trade was in danger of being diverted to Charleston via the newly built Hamburg railroad. Savannah responded to the latter threat by reaching into the interior with its own railway to Macon, finally completed in 1843.¹ The project was an immediate success, ushering in an era of growth and prosperity which lasted until the Civil War.² The town's population which had remained almost static from 1800 to 1830 nearly trebled in the next thirty years.³ Perhaps more significant than mere increase in numbers, however, was the influx of people of foreign birth. Some of these came to Savannah to participate in construction of the railway; others were attracted by economic opportunities resulting from its completion. Whatever their motives for coming these foreigners were to play an important part in the life of the town in late ante-bellum years.

Unlike many ports of the lower South, Savannah's history was not rooted in periods of Spanish or French occupation. Its predominantly Protestant population of British origins had been little affected by the small number of immigrants who had come in through the years. Now, however, the little trickle of foreigners swelled into a steadily increasing flow, neither Protestant nor British. By 1848 about 40 per cent of all white adult males were of foreign birth,⁴ and by 1860 the entire adult white population was approximately half native and half alien-born.⁵ More-

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1. For a sketch of the building of the Central Railroad see Ulrich B. Phillips, *History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt* (New York, 1908), 262ff.

2. Visitors to Savannah frequently commented on the increasing business activity, sometimes contrasting it with conditions in neighboring towns. Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 1834, 1835* (London, 1836), 117ff.; William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller* . . . (New York, 1850), 343; [J. F. Greenough], "The City of Savannah," in *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, . . . July, 1853, pp. 58-62.

3. Savannah's population in the census years from 1800 to 1860 was: 1800, 5,166; 1810, 6,215; 1820, 7,723; 1830, 7,776; 1840, 11,214; 1850, 15,312; 1860, 22,292.

4. Joseph Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah* (Savannah, 1848), 10.
5. The total white population was 13,876 of whom it is estimated that 60 per cent, or 8,325, were adults. There were 4,136 foreigners in Savannah who were twenty years of age or over. Compiled from Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule I (Unpublished).

over, two-thirds of the increase in white population between 1850 and 1860 consisted either of newly arrived immigrants or children born to foreign parents during the decade.⁶

Housing the immigrants presented a major problem. Only a few could afford to rent or buy houses in the existing residential areas. Small shopkeepers ordinarily resided under the roofs where they established their businesses. Most of the newcomers, therefore, drifted into slums which sprang up on the fringes of the town, especially on the west where the Central station was located. Yamacraw, a swampy area in the northwest, formerly inhabited largely by free Negroes, soon became the place of greatest concentration of foreigners. Bordering on the river and the canal, this district had no attraction except cheap rent. It was poorly drained and without sanitation facilities, while the houses were of the shabbiest construction. Large numbers of adult males who had no close family ties crowded into disreputable boarding houses. By 1848 Oglethorpe Ward, which included Yamacraw, had a population of 2,326, while the average population of the other wards was only 473.⁷ It is not surprising therefore that Yamacraw became notorious for its vice, filth, and general disorder.⁸

Almost 70 per cent of the foreigners in Savannah were Irish, and they comprised a large portion of the unfortunate Yamacraw population. For the most part they were unskilled workers with little or no education who had arrived virtually penniless. They were obliged to live wherever they could find shelter and to take whatever jobs they could get, regardless of individual tastes or aptitudes. If they acquired skills which enabled them to find more suitable homes and more congenial types of employment their places as residents of Yamacraw and as workers at menial tasks were quickly taken by other Irishmen who continued to arrive.⁹ Almost none came with enough capital to set up businesses of their own. Those with sufficient education readily found places as clerks and bookkeepers, and a few picked up employment as watchmen or messengers. Most of the jobs which they were forced to take, however, required backbreak-

6. The total increase in white population was 5,480, and the increase in foreign-born was 2,218. There were approximately 1,500 children of foreign parents who were less than ten years old.

Bancroft, *Census of the City of Savannah*, 15ff.

8. Johnston B. Tufts, *Minority Report on the Impropriety of Cutting Down the Growth on the Canal and Its Immediate Neighborhood* (Savannah, 1844), 3.

9. *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), February 25, 1852; *The Savannah Daily Georgian*, December 17, 1853.

ing toil which some of them had not the health or stamina to endure. Many never completely recovered from severe privations suffered before emigration and during the voyage to America.¹⁰

The Germans, including many Jews, were next to the Irish in numbers, but their situation was quite different. They were better educated, and few were without skills or capital. Furthermore, ships bringing immigrants out of German ports were superior to those which brought the Irish, and most Germans arrived in good physical condition.¹¹ Many of them lived temporarily in the slums, but as they set up their shops they moved out, frequently giving employment and shelter to others of their nationality who were of less substance. Difference of language presented a barrier, but they uniformly fared better than the Irish. National groups other than the Germans and Irish were widely distributed in economic status and their numbers were relatively small.¹²

In general aliens readily adjusted to types of employment which the town provided. In 1850 they were engaged in about a hundred different occupations, but more than a third were common laborers. Ten years later they were following twice as many pursuits, and the percentage of common laborers among them had dwindled noticeably. Many worked in various capacities with the Central Railroad while others were engaged in the transfer of freight between the station and the wharves. Construction work which accompanied the continuing prosperity of the town found recruits among the immigrants and provided jobs for many carpenters, painters, plasterers, and brickmasons. The presence of the newcomers which had somewhat stimulated the building boom also created an enlarged retail business, and into this field the immigrants moved so rapidly that by 1860 they controlled a majority of the smaller businesses which dealt in foods and wearing apparel. Grocers, bakers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers, and clothiers combined outnumbered common laborers among them. Contrary to local custom immigrant women

10. An eye-witness account of wretched conditions of immigrants en route to Savannah see Emily P. Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia* ([Oberlin, Ohio], 1850), 8-9.

11. Investigation of conditions on immigrant vessels ultimately brought improvements. From reports of the investigation it is obvious that Irish immigrants underwent the severest hardships. See "Report of Select Committee of the Senate of the United States on the Sickness and Mortality on Board Emigrant Ships," in *Senate Reports*, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 1853-1854.

12. Compiled from Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule I, and Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule I (Unpublished).

earned their own living or supplemented family incomes, often following pursuits earlier dominated by Negroes. They worked as seamstresses, milliners, laundresses, boarding house keepers, and servants. Most of those in domestic service were Irish, scores of whom found places in the homes of wealthy slaveholding families.¹³

As the immigrants became settled into the community they tended to accept local mores, especially in their relationship with Negroes. Although poverty sometimes forced them to live in the same area with free Negroes, and persuaded them to engage in covert trade with slaves, they managed to maintain the social barrier between the races. Moreover, they accepted the prevailing attitude toward the institution of slavery. During the heat of the sectional controversy St. Patrick's Day toasts were as intemperate as were the pronouncements of the most rabid natives. The following are fairly typical: "May the escutcheon of my adopted and favored country never be tarnished by the adoption of the motto of the infuriate bigot or the mad abolitionist—two of the most venomous vipers that could possibly be fostered in a nation's bosom";¹⁴ "The South! — She is able to take care of her own interests! She will tolerate no legislation on her vested rights! Death to the traitor who would dare to interfere with them, and thus dissever the bonds that connect our glorious Union";¹⁵ "America — The land of the free and the home of the brave. May she ever escape the desolating influence of abolitionists, fanatics and mobites."¹⁶

In 1855 the local Turnverein "seceded" from the national organization because of a resolution opposing slavery which was passed at a national convention in Buffalo.¹⁷ The next year foreigners of practically every nationality represented in Savannah took part in a mass meeting to consider action on the Kansas question. They were as critical of Northerners as were the natives.¹⁸ It has been pointed out repeatedly that the reputation for opposing slavery which is attributed to the German immigrants as a whole was not applicable to those who settled in the South, and that the Germans were prone to accept conditions

13. *Ibid.*

14. Toast offered by Father Jeremiah F. O'Neill. *Georgian*, March 20, 1837.

15. Toast offered by C. MacArdell. *Georgian*, March 20, 1839.

16. Toast offered by Michael Prendergast. *Ibid.*

17. *Morning News*, November 9, 1855.

18. *Ibid.*, March 26, 1856.

as they existed wherever they settled.¹⁹ Certainly the Germans in Savannah were no different from other aliens, most of whom acquired slaves as soon as they were financially able.²⁰

While the foreigners gradually made adjustments to the ways of the community during the 1850's, the community in turn perceptibly changed because of their presence. Among the local institutions most affected were the churches. Protestant congregations received relatively few new members although among them were several ministers who served local churches.²¹ Catholics and Jews, however, came in sufficient numbers to revolutionize their Savannah congregations.

Sephardic Jews, using a Portuguese service, had worshipped in Savannah for more than a hundred years when the late antebellum immigration reached its peak, and their congregation had been incorporated since 1790. Mickva Israel had taken in a few German Jews from time to time, but it remained small and poor, with the old families keeping firm control. With reluctance they accepted more and more of the Germans until the newcomers were in a majority. Rules regarding observance of the Sabbath were liberalized, and regulations governing membership, seatholding, and voting were relaxed. In 1852 German-born Jacob Rosenfeld became the first full-time Rabbi. The synagogue was much strengthened numerically and financially, and while the congregation generally chose their Parnass from the old Sephardic families, a new era had dawned.²²

The local Catholic group had neither the continuity nor the stability which had characterized Mickva Israel. As a congregation it had come into being about 1800 and for years consisted of a small heterogeneous group, indifferently served by itinerant priests. In the early 1830's an Irish-born priest, Jeremiah F. O'Neill, came to Savannah to live and proved of inestimable

19. Andreas Dorpaten, "The German Element and the Issues of the Civil War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXIX (June, 1942), 55-76.

20. In 1860 132 people of foreign birth were slaveholders, of whom 47 were Irish, 37 German, and 18 English. Other slaveholders among the aliens were Scots, French, Italians, Portuguese, Russians, and Scandinavians. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule II (Unpublished).

21. James and William Quantock, Methodists from England, W. Epping, Lutheran from Germany, and Thomas Rambaut, Baptist from France were among the Protestant ministers. *Morning News*, September 4, 1852, December 3, 1853, January 5, 1855; *Georgian*, January 4, 1856. See also Haygood S. Bowden, *History of Savannah Methodism* . . . (Macon, 1929), 76.

22. Minutes of Mickva Israel, *passim*. Photostatic copy in Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. While the early minutes use the form above, all later documents relating to the congregation give the spelling Mickva Israel. See also F. D. Lee and J. L. Agnew, *Historical Record of the City of Savannah* (Savannah, 1869), 88.

benefit to the people of his faith.²³ Diplomatic and unselfish, he gained the respect and good will of most of the town and thus was in position to help those of his countrymen who came later. He worked tirelessly to find employment for his incoming flock, recruiting whole labor gangs for construction work on the railroad.²⁴ He acted as mediator between them and their employers, and when Connaughtmen and Munstermen renewed an ancient feud while working on the railroad right-of-way he spent weeks in their camps trying to bring about a peaceful settlement. Meanwhile he made a fine impression on the natives in the vicinity.²⁵

O'Neill not only did much to mitigate the hardships of the Irish when they first arrived, but continued his work in their behalf after they became settled. He was instrumental in establishing the Sisters of Mercy and gave direction to the women, Irish-born like himself, in their effort to care for an ever-increasing brood of Catholic orphans.²⁶ He sponsored a campaign against drinking which prompted a Protestant temperance leader many years later to say that he was "the moving spirit" of the early movement in the state and "a great power for good in Savannah, and chiefly among a class of persons who could not have been reached through any other agency."²⁷ Meanwhile his congregation grew into the largest in town. Other priests joined him, and in 1850 a Savannah diocese was created. By 1860 the Catholic church had become a powerful factor in affairs of the community.

The rapid growth of the Catholic congregation did not go unnoticed by the natives. Indifference changed to uneasiness, and as most of the Catholics were Irish it was around this group that anxiety centered. Savannah was proud of its long tradition of

23. John Gilmary Shea, *A History of the Catholic Church Within the United States*, (4 vols., New York, 1892), IV, 101.

24. In 1837 O'Neill inserted an advertisement in a local paper headed "300 Labourers Wanted." *Georgian*, February 23, 1837. Immigrants used O'Neill as a reference in trying to get jobs or in setting up new businesses. For example see *Georgian*, November 2, 1838.

25. Several letters from a person who lived along the right-of-way described O'Neill's actions fully. *Georgian*, March 30, 1838, March 16, 19, 1839. For an account of his mediation see J. J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia* . . . (New York, 1879), 502; and Martha Gallaudet Waring (ed.), "Charles Seton Hardee's Recollections of Old Savannah," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XII (December, 1928), 380. Despite the apparent gravity of the situation along the right-of-way the official reports of the railway merely mention "some disturbances originating from sectional differences among the laborers." *Reports of the Presidents, Engineers-in-Chief and Superintendents, of the Central Rail-Road and Banking Company of Georgia* (Savannah, 1854), 34.

26. Charles Edgeworth Jones, *Education in Georgia* (Washington, 1889), 22; O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, 112; Shea, *A History of the Catholic Church Within the United States*, IV, 98, 101. The City of Savannah gave a lot for the building. *Georgian*, March 21, 1846.

27. H. A. Scamp, *King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton* . . . (Blakely, Ga., 1888), 426, 428; *Republican*, February 11, 1841.

religious tolerance, and some of its most respected citizens were Irish-born, albeit most of them were Protestants from North Ireland. Moreover, on frequent occasions during Ireland's travails local leaders had openly expressed sympathy for the unfortunate people of Old Erin.²⁸ Members of the highly regarded Hibernian Society had often enthusiastically applauded that favorite St. Patrick's Day toast, "America as she is, and Ireland as she ought to be—free and independent."²⁹

Sympathy which the populace had for the Irish weakened as they poured into Savannah, for unlike the Germans and British, they did not immediately fit into the local scene. They were free white laborers, a class which had never been large in the town, and they were Catholics in a traditionally Protestant community. Moreover, practices of the old country were in conflict with local usage. Some of the Irish ignored city ordinances governing observance of the Sabbath by keeping their shops open and selling liquor and sometimes disturbed church services with their carousing.³⁰

Particularly offensive was the influence they had on the Negroes. Slaves of the surrounding area who were permitted to sell country produce in the town were sometimes prone to steal such produce from their masters. Foreign tradesmen, notably the Irish, accepted without question whatever the slaves brought in. Most of them began this trade with no intention of doing wrong and were unaware of the fact that they were perhaps encouraging the slaves to steal. The trade became so lucrative, however, that some continued it clandestinely with full knowledge that they were going counter to established customs and even violating city ordinances. Furthermore, they often paid slaves in liquor with the result that they became disorderly. A few Irish and Jewish peddlers who operated at the edge of town were particularly persistent in illicit trade and successfully resisted all efforts of the authorities to suppress it.³¹

28. In 1828 "The Association of the Friends of Ireland in Savannah" was organized, with Richard W. Habersham, William Davies, Mordecai Myers and John Gullmartin, among the officers. *Georgian*, September 25, 1828. In 1846 the *Georgian* called attention to action in Mobile to aid the suffering poor in Ireland and called upon Savannah to do likewise. *Georgian*, March 27, 1846.

29. This toast with minor variations was almost an annual offering at the St. Patrick's Day meeting of the Hibernian Society. This particular version appeared in 1837. *Georgian*, March 18, 1837.

30. The problem of disturbance of public worship was not a new one in Savannah, but it was greatly aggravated after the foreigners became more numerous.

31. Frederick L. Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* . . . (New York, 1856), 440; Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America* . . . (2 vols., London, 1859), I, 321, 323; Richard H. Shryock, ed., *Letters of Richard D. Arnold, M.D., 1808-1876* (Durham, 1929), 44.

These and other transgressions by the Irish gave them a bad reputation which, while not altogether undeserved, was certainly exaggerated. Only occasionally were they guilty of serious offenses such as arson, assault, rape, or murder, but every week some of them appeared in the mayor's court to face charges of brawling, keeping disorderly houses, harboring ship-jumping seamen, and petty thieving.³² In some instances they were proved innocent, and a majority of the violations were probably traceable to excessive drinking. Fundamentally, of course, their conduct had nothing to do with nationality or religion. The cumulative effect, however, was a growing contempt for the Irish-Catholic element among the people of Savannah who never fully comprehended the difficulties which the Irish had recently faced or were currently experiencing. Their suffering in the old country and during their voyage to America had left many broken in health and spirit. A few were facing slow death from tuberculosis which had been contracted during long periods of want. Others fell easy prey to the semitropical diseases of the region.³³ Lonely, discouraged, homesick, and living in utter squalor, many of them no doubt turned to drink in an effort to find escape from misery and sorrow.

Another source of anti-Irish bias was their overenthusiastic, and sometimes premature, participation in politics.³⁴ As one native said: "In a twinkling he masters the science of government and winds his way without a light through all the labyrinths of politics. . . . He determines to take time by the forelock, and cannot understand why, in this land of freedom, a *month* or even a *week* should be necessary to the santification of political privileges."³⁵ As elsewhere in the country they affiliated with the

32. Shryock, ed., *Arnold Letters*, 47; *Morning News*, January 4, 20, 1855, February 15, 1855, June 5, 1855, August 2, 27, 28, 1855, December 4, 5, 1855, March 11, 1859, December 13, 1859; *Georgian*, March 21, 1846, December 28, 1846, April 28, 1853, February 26, 1854, January 3, 1855.

33. Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia*, 9; William Duncan, Jr., *Tabulated Mortuary Record of the City of Savannah from Jan. 1, 1854 to December 31, 1869* (Savannah, 1870), 22; R. D. Arnold, "The Identity of Dengue, or Break-Bone Fever and of Yellow Fever," in *The Savannah Journal of Medicine* (Savannah, n. d.), 315; Adam Hodgson, *Remarks During a Journey Through North America in the Years 1819, 1820, and 1821, in a Series of Letters* (New York, 1823), 122-23. In a tabulation of cases of tuberculosis by nationalities Duncan shows that almost 40 per cent were Irish. Arnold, writing after the terrible yellow fever epidemic of 1854, stated that yellow fever was more likely to be fatal to foreigners than to natives. Hodgson referred to yellow fever as "stranger's fever," saying, "I understand probabilities are against survival of a stranger from fatal effects of yellow fever."

34. Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, I, 177. Mackay believed that resentment of Irish political activity was the major factor in the rise of Know-Nothingism.

35. Letter from W. W. Starke in *Republican*, April 2, 1861.

Democrats, a toast at an Irish gathering in Savannah in 1828 indicating their political views then and later: "To the Shillaley: An Old Hickory for the 4th March 1829."³⁶ Under the tutelage of skilled and sometimes unscrupulous politicians they quickly learned the many iniquitous devices by which political control is so often established and maintained. They were particularly active in city politics where victory meant a generous share of patronage. In return for their votes they were also permitted to engage in businesses without buying licenses and to carry on illegal trade with Negroes without serious interference. A candidate for mayor who was defeated by Irish votes sourly wrote: "The Mayor & Marshall . . . regulate the shopkeepers politically by *not* requaling as to the Law."³⁷

Prior to 1840 the Savannah *Republican*, a Whig paper, was critical of the Irish, and with some justification accused them of voting before they were eligible and without regard for issues involved. During the presidential campaign of 1840 William Hogan, Irish-born apostate Catholic, became junior editor of the *Republican*, and on St. Patrick's Day he opened a campaign against Irish-Catholics. He charged, "There is not a Loco Foco in Savannah this day, who is not a native of Ireland. . . ." ³⁸ He condemned them for remaining Irish instead of becoming Americans. The *Republican* had previously been accused by an Irish correspondent of slandering the Irish merely because they were not Whigs, suggesting that the paper was becoming a tool of the Native Americans.³⁹ Now the Savannah *Georgian*, a Democratic journal, replied to Hogan and defended the Irish. For the next few months the two papers carried on a scurrilous war of words centering about the Irish. In August Hogan resigned and dropped from sight, but his campaign had stirred the Irish, and under the spur of bitter insult they angrily appeared at the polls with clubs and precipitated a series of riots.⁴⁰

Appeals from other Irishmen immediately appeared in the local papers. They said that the name of the Emerald Isle had been disgraced, and warned those who voted without being qualified that they had committed perjury.⁴¹ The riots seemed to have a sobering effect, both on the Irish and on the newspapers. The

36. *Georgian*, March 20, 1828.

37. Shryock, ed., *Arnold Letters*, 39.

38. *Republican*, February 15, 1840, March 17, 18, 1840.

39. *Georgian*, July 17, 1839.

40. *Republican*, August 12, 1840, September 9, 1840.

41. *Ibid.*, October 1, 1840.

Republican continued to print current jokes which ridiculed the Irish, yet it discontinued the vituperation which had marked the writings of Hogan.⁴² It took due note of Father O'Neill's efforts to form a temperance society among his parishioners and wished him well in his efforts.⁴³ Perhaps there was a veiled suggestion that his Irish flock needed such an organization. Later, however, it gave the society credit for great improvement in conduct on election day, paying O'Neill a high compliment: "He spares no exertion in the cause of good order, any more than in works of charity."⁴⁴

During the next few years there was fraud and corruption in which both parties were involved, and while anti-Irish feeling did not disappear it was much less in evidence in the newspaper columns. The Irish continued to support the Democrats, however, and Whig disapproval of them was but thinly veiled. In the political upheaval following the Compromise of 1850 they defied Mayor Richard Wayne whom they had helped elect and voted with the Unionists in the state-wide election.⁴⁵ In the city election shortly thereafter, however, they used their bludgeons at the polls to re-elect Wayne.⁴⁶ During this period the *Georgian* acquired an Irish-born, Catholic editor, Philip J. Punch, who ably defended the Irish and the Democrats and thus helped keep the subject of Irish-Catholic voters before the public.⁴⁷

Despite the controversy over Irish voters, however, no clearly defined anti-foreign prejudice was discernible.⁴⁸ An effort to inject a nativist theme into the state election in 1853 had no ap-

42. *Ibid.*, October 6, 1840. An English visitor to Savannah during this period commented that while the newspapers were not as good as the *Charleston Courier* they were "untainted by the vituperative language and abusive style" of papers of the North. J. S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (2 vols., London, 1842), I, 129.

43. *Republican*, February 11, 1841.

44. *Ibid.*, September 13, 1841.

45. Shryock, ed., *Arnold Letters*, 44.

46. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

47. When Punch severed relations with the *Georgian* in 1856 he had been with the paper for twelve years, at one time being owner and publisher. For a short time during this period Austrian-born Joseph Ganahl was a partner of Punch. For information on the changing editors and owners of the paper see *Georgian*, January 1, 1849, May 30, 1849, April 20, 1853, June 24, 1853, December 3, 1854, July 10, 1855, February 1, 1856. See also O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, 511.

48. The *Morning News*, politically neutral, in commenting on the action of a group of Irish in Iowa who had resolved to oppose any candidate who endorsed Louis Kossuth, said: "Our political institutions protect all religious creeds, and regard all upon the same platform of civil and religious rights. We don't even allow the notion of toleration; for no one has a right to tolerate others. The introduction of any religious feuds into elections here is exceedingly out of place. Those who do it will be sorry hereafter for their indiscretion." March 27, 1852.

parent effect in Savannah.⁴⁹ In the city election which followed shortly both Whigs and Democrats had foreigners on their slates, and each slate also included an Irish-Catholic.⁵⁰ In the city election of 1854 the Democrats were defeated by a coalition reform People's Ticket,⁵¹ and during the year the reform group attempted to enforce city ordinances more strictly.⁵² Their action brought protests of "systematic oppression," some from people of foreign birth,⁵³ and in the course of the cleanup campaign numerous foreigners were fined for various violations.

The People's Party quickly dissolved after its victory and in 1855 the anti-foreign, anti-Catholic Know-Nothing lodges which had appeared locally the year before now became quite active. As state and city elections approached, rumors circulated that men of foreign birth would have to present naturalization papers before they could vote.⁵⁴ There was unusual activity in the local courts which granted naturalization papers, but it is not clear whether those applying for papers had lost their records or had been voting illegally.⁵⁵

The local Know-Nothings were generally former Whigs, although they included a sprinkling of old Democrats who had lost out in the councils of their own party during the unusual realignments in the past few years. In the city election of 1855 the first avowedly Know-Nothing slate appeared in Savannah, but it included Scotch-born John B. Gallie, a former Whig.⁵⁶ The Anti-Know-Nothings included three foreigners on their ticket, one each from Scotland, Ireland, and the French West Indies.⁵⁷ In the election the Know-Nothings elected the mayor and two aldermen while the Anti-Know-Nothing Scot won easily. Moreover, one of the foreigners on the Anti-Know-Nothing ticket was beaten.⁵⁸

Under the circumstances it is impossible to conclude that the local nativist party was anything other than old Whigs appear-

49. *Georgian*, September 30, 1853, October 5, 12, 1853. Also see Horace Montgomery, *Cracker Parties* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 126-27.

50. *Georgian*, December 7, 1853.

51. *Ibid.*, December 5, 6, 7, 29, 1854.

52. *Morning News*, January 18, 1855.

53. *Ibid.*, September 19, 1855, October 1, 1855; *Georgian*, September 22, 1855.

54. The United States District Court, the United States Circuit Court, the Superior Court, and the City Court all granted naturalization papers. There is enough duplication of names on the records to indicate that many naturalized citizens had merely lost their papers. As many of the foreigners in Savannah at the time perhaps had been naturalized at other places it is impossible to learn how many had been voting without being naturalized.

55. *Georgian*, November 28, 1855.

56. Robert Lachlison, Dominick O'Byrne, and John G. Falligant.

57. *Morning News*, December 4, 1855.

ing under another name, with a few former Democrats as temporary allies. It is doubtful that they were any more strongly anti-Catholic than they had been in previous years, and they certainly were not anti-foreign per se or they could not have supported Gallie. Furthermore, it was well-known in Savannah that Gallie was part owner of a vessel that had transported many of the Irish-Catholics to Savannah.⁵⁹

The Know-Nothings lost another close city election in 1856, but as the sectional controversy re-emerged the party disappeared. Then followed a regrouping of parties somewhat along the lines of the Union-Secession break of 1850. The foreigners were still predominantly unionist in sentiment, and in the crucial election of 1860 they supported Douglas or Bell.⁶⁰ They opposed secession until it was an accomplished fact and then they generally became loyal Confederates.

Irishmen were somewhat handicapped by the condemnation of their political escapades and their general reputation for lawlessness. The good qualities of individuals, however, were not entirely obscured. Employers found many of them hard workers who needed only time and opportunity to develop into valuable citizens. Meanwhile, however, other alien groups were not similarly handicapped. The Germans were set apart by their language, but gained a reputation for honesty, thrift, and independence. They, too, drank freely, but with enough restraint that they were seldom arrested for drunkenness or disorder. The Jews, benefiting from the esteem in which the old Jewish families were held, quietly moved into the community and won general respect as frugal, law-abiding people. Even the trouble caused by a few disreputable peddlers of their group seemingly aroused no anti-Semitic feeling.⁶¹

In view of the many problems which the presence of large numbers of aliens presented it is significant that the insidious Know-Nothing dogma did not flourish in Savannah. This reluctance to give way to anti-foreign prejudice might be traced in part to certain organizations in which natives and aliens had associated for many years. Of particular importance was the Union Society, founded in 1750 by a Jew, a Catholic, and a

Protestant, for purposes of charity. It had always transcended lines of nationality and religion and had a proud record of having maintained the Bethesda Orphanage since the time of its establishment.⁶² Foreigners were invited to join in the society and its charities and accepted with alacrity as soon as they were financially able. Since 1819 the St. Andrews Society had afforded Scotch immigrants the opportunity of mingling with some of the wealthies and most aristocratic people in Savannah.⁶³ The Hibernian Society, founded in 1812 provided similar privileges to many Irish immigrants.⁶⁴ Furthermore, foreigners had not only associated with natives in such organizations as the Georgia Historical Society, but had taken an important part in their organization and later activities.⁶⁵ Several were members of the Anti-Duelling Society which had some success in curbing that unfortunate custom.⁶⁶ Many belonged to fraternal orders, the Young Men's Christian Association, and to civic groups such as the Savannah Port Society and the Chamber of Commerce. Some natives and foreigners were united in business partnerships.⁶⁷

Existing organizations did not always provide social outlets for foreigners, and in many cases they started societies of their own. The German Friendly Society, the Irish Union Society, and the Hebrew Benevolent Society were originally planned for the purpose of aiding needy immigrants, but gradually became largely social in nature, as did the German Turnverein.⁶⁸ Volunteer fire

62. Bancroft, *Genesis of the City of Savannah*, 45; *Rules of the Union Society . . .* (Savannah, 1851), *passim*; *Minutes of the Union Society: Being an Abstract of Existing Records, from 1750 to 1858 . . .* (Savannah, 1860), *passim*; *Annual Reports of the President of the Union Society and Proceedings of its 112th, 113th, 114th and 115th Anniversaries* (Savannah, 1871), *passim*.

63. *Rules of the St. Andrew's Society of the City of Savannah . . .* (Savannah, 1872), *passim*.

64. A. E. Sholes, comp., *Chronological History of Savannah . . .* (Savannah, 1900), 69; *Substance of a Discourse Delivered before the Hibernian Society of the City of Savannah . . . by Right Rev. John England* (Charleston, 1824), *passim*; *An Account of the Reception of Gen. LaFayette in Savannah on Saturday, March 19th, 1825* (Savannah, 1825), *passim*.

65. The Georgia Historical Society seems to have stemmed from a society formed in 1809 to found a public library. Aliens were prominent in this earlier organization. Richard D. Arnold, "Address before the Georgia Historical Society," in *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, III (1873), 416, 424, 426.

66. Thomas Gamble, *Savannah Duels and Duellists, 1753-1877* (Savannah, 1923), 199.

67. For example see *Constitution and By-Laws of the Savannah Chamber of Commerce* (Savannah, 1841), 18; and *By-Laws of Solomon's Lodge, No. 1, of Free and Accepted Masons, Savannah, Georgia* (Savannah, 1867), *passim*. The various city directories generally listed the officers of fraternal orders, and foreigners were well represented. The directories also provide information on many native-foreign business partnerships.

68. C. A. Linn says that tradition persists that the society was formed to help German immigrants in Savannah. But at the time Linn wrote the society had long been social rather than philanthropic. *The History of the German Friendly Society of Savannah, Georgia, 1837-1937* (Savannah, 1937), 34.

59. *Georgian*, January 17, 1849, February 1, 1849.

60. Shryock, ed., *Arnold Letters*, 96.

61. That there was some anti-Semitism in Savannah cannot be denied. See *ibid.*, 96. The most scathing criticism of the activities of Jewish peddlers, however, is to be found in the writings of visitors to the region. See Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, I, 322.

companies which included Irish and German units were sometimes more like social clubs than fire-fighting teams.

Perhaps the most spectacular local organization were the several volunteer military companies. Some people of foreign birth were included in all of them, and the Chatham Artillery, oldest of the local groups, was for several years commanded by a foreigner.⁶⁹ As in the case of the fire companies there were military organizations composed chiefly of Irish and Germans. The Irish Jasper Greens were slightly older than the German Volunteers and enjoyed the distinction of being the only Savannah unit to serve in the Mexican War.⁷⁰ There was keen rivalry between the companies, and at their frequent parades they vied with each other in military precision and colorful dress. Washington's Birthday, the Fourth of July, and the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans were regular parade occasions, and the alien-born took part in celebrating without apparent self-consciousness, perhaps feeling that by participating in exclusively American occasions they were themselves becoming more truly American.

During their tour of duty in the Mexican War the Irish Jasper Greens did not distinguish themselves, but their record was perhaps comparable to that of other volunteer companies. Their one unusual experience was an unfortunate one. At a Mexican port members of another Georgia company, seemingly with nativist tendencies, greeted them with insults. In the brawl which inevitably followed nobody was seriously hurt. That night, however, the Greens mistook a party of Illinois troops who boarded the transport where they were sleeping for their opponents in the earlier fracas and fired upon them. Before the boarding party was properly identified several men had been killed or wounded. The entire Savannah unit was placed in arrest, but subsequent investigation brought them full exoneration.⁷¹ At the close of the war they were welcomed home as heroes.

As has been seen there was social contact between aliens and natives at the highest levels, and the great cultural diversity of the foreigners was a leavening for the old residents. Musicians and music teachers introduced works of European masters, and brought familiarity with a wide variety of instruments.⁷² A for-

69. John B. Gallie, mentioned above as a Know-Nothing candidate for alderman. He was later killed in action while serving with the Confederate army. Lee and Agnew, *Historical Record of the City of Savannah*, 88.

70. *Ibid.*, 78.

71. *Ibid.*, *Georgian*, September 18, 29, 1846, October 1, 12, 22, 1846, November 5, 1846.

72. *Morning News*, October 27, 1852, January 15, 1853.

eign-owned music store not only carried a full line of musical instruments and sheet music but became a central ticket agency for local concerts and other entertainments.⁷³ A German band, with a German director and personnel, was in great demand at social functions and was a major attraction at parades. So highly was it regarded that the local newspapers praised it editorially and called upon the local populace to give it full support.⁷⁴

The German Turnverein attracted so much attention by its exhibitions of gymnastics that other young men of Savannah organized a similar society and engaged a German instructor.⁷⁵ A foreign fencing master aroused interest in that sport and a Frenchman was one of the most active members of a local regatta club. Several dancing academies flourished under foreign instructors. One, established by a Frenchman in 1843, was still popular and prosperous when the Civil War came. Augustus Bonaud, the master, taught European steps to both juvenile and adult groups, and the social functions which he held in connection with the academy were so successful that he was engaged by wealthy patrons to stage elaborate soirees and costume balls.⁷⁶ There were several artists among the foreigners, one of whom gained a fine reputation locally as a portrait painter.⁷⁷

Foreign-owned and operated hotels and restaurants were among the most popular in town and were the scenes of many public dinners and banquets. They served a wide variety of foreign wines and dishes. One caterer had formerly prepared banquets for Louis Philippe.⁷⁸ Moreover, local hostesses depended upon foreign bakers, fruiterers, and confectioners for many delicacies served to their guests. Bars were generally operated in connection with the better eating places and almost invariably with the cheaper ones. Furthermore, they were important adjuncts to the many houses of entertainment which foreigners operated, such as pistol galleries, bowling alleys, and billiard halls.⁷⁹

Foreigners found Savannah no Utopia, and many were dis-

73. *Ibid.*, February 12, 1852.

74. *Georgian*, June 13, 1849.

75. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1853.

76. *Ibid.*, November 23, 1843, April 14, 1846, December 1, 1846, January 26, 27, 1849; *Morning News*, February 24, 1852, January 15, 1853, March 16, 1854.

77. Peter Laurens failed in several business ventures in Savannah before succeeding as a portrait painter. *Georgian*, December 24, 1827, March 13, 1828; *Morning News*, May 10, 1853.

78. Monsieur N. LeFort, who operated the Paris House Confectionery. *Morning News*, April 22, 1852.

79. There were representatives of almost every nationality in Savannah among the barkeepers.

appointed at conditions in their adopted city. Some drifted away, seeking happier situations. Many others met untimely deaths before they were able to establish themselves. The yellow fever epidemic in 1854 carried away approximately six hundred foreigners, nearly all adults.⁸⁰ Most of those who stayed in the town for a reasonable time, however, were able at least to make a living, and a considerable number prospered. A few had become wealthy by 1860, but as a rule their wealth was in direct ratio to their length of residence. Altogether almost two hundred aliens owned property valued at \$5,000 or more in 1860, including a few who had come to Savannah after 1840.⁸¹

In the process of bettering themselves economically the foreign element helped to bring significant changes in the commercial life of Savannah. Indeed, they had come to dominate many types of businesses. The city directory for 1860 shows that they owned and operated 43 of 61 dry goods and clothing establishments, 127 of 174 retail groceries, 31 of 38 saloons, 8 of 14 cigar and tobacco shops, 6 of 7 barber and hairdressing salons, 12 of 15 bakeries, 6 of 7 confectioneries, 4 of 7 hotels, and 7 of 9 fancy stores. Of the 9 local banks 6 had foreign-born directors, and while the commission business was largely an operation of the natives, several of the wealthier commission merchants were of foreign birth.⁸²

Listing of foreigners who distinguished themselves in various ways would serve no purpose here, but the story of Savannah in the late ante-bellum period would not be complete without mention of Alexander A. Smets, a Frenchman who collected one of the most remarkable libraries in the United States;⁸³ Scotch-born Henry McAlpine and Andrew Low who were rewarded for their part in building the Central Railroad by having locomotives named for them;⁸⁴ Michael Prendergast who donated

80. *Names of the Dead, being a Record of the Mortality in Savannah During the Epidemic of 1854* (Savannah, 1854), *passim*; *Report of John E. Ward, Mayor of the City of Savannah for the Year Ending 31st October 1854* (Savannah, 1854), 9-12.

81. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule I (Unpublished). A few foreigners had made enough money to retire to plantations and hence were not included in the Savannah census figures.

82. *Directory for the City of Savannah, To Which is Appended a Business Directory for 1860* (Savannah, 1860), *passim*.

83. *Catalogue of the Private Library of the late Mr. A. A. Smets, Savannah, Ga.* (New York, 1868); *Memorial Biographies of the New-England Historic Genealogical Society* (Boston, 1894), V, 42-44; *De Bow's Review*, July, 1852, pp. 97-98.

84. *Twenty-First Report of the President and Superintendent of the Central Rail Road and Banking Co. of Ga.* (Savannah, 1855), 17.

the land for the Catholic Cemetery;⁸⁵ and Charles Green, an Englishman who obtained from his native land at his own expense the plans for the famous Independent Presbyterian Church.⁸⁶

These people in their own ways were pioneers, imbued with much the same spirit which guided earlier immigrants to the New World. Like their predecessors they had to compromise with their environment, neither planting islands of their own nationality and culture, nor resisting ultimate assimilation. For what they gained materially they gave of their intelligence, skill, and labor, and in the course of this interchange the cultural base of Savannah was broadened. War stopped immigration in 1861, but it could not erase the imprint of the foreigners who were already implanted there.

85. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, 521; *Georgian*, July 2, 1853.

86. *Morning News*, February 7, 1853.