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Irish Identity Politics

The Reinvention of Speaker John W. McCormack of Boston

Garrison Nelson

From his election in 1940 as Majority Leader to his last day as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1971, John W. McCormack of Boston occupied the highest rungs of leadership in the Congress. Many biographies and autobiographies cover the lives and public careers of five Speakers, but not one has been devoted to McCormack — not because he was unimportant and irrelevant. He was a very private man who could rearrange the facts of his life to suit his political needs. The story had great resonance in Boston because its Irish gatekeepers — James Michael Curley, John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald, Patrick J. “P.J.” Kennedy, and Martin Lomasney — led lives identical to that of McCormack. They accepted the reinvented history and watched him move rapidly up the city’s political ladder. Through a detailed examination of city, state, and federal documents, secular and sacerdotal, in the United States and Canada, a clearer portrait of McCormack emerges.

Of the twenty-seven amendments added to the Constitution since 1789, the successful passage of one may be attributed to a single news photograph taken November 27, 1963, five days after the murder of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States. Newly installed President Lyndon B. Johnson was pictured at the rostrum of the U.S. House of Representatives giving his first formal address to the Congress, the nation, and the world.

Two very old white men were seated behind Johnson: to the president’s left, Democratic Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, the president pro tempore of the Senate, second in line to President Johnson; to the president’s right, Democratic Congressman John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, the Speaker of the House and next in line to President Johnson.

Senator Hayden entered Congress as Arizona’s first elected U.S. representative in 1912, the year his state entered the union. Hayden left the House for the Senate in 1927, serving in that chamber until 1969, when he retired at the age of ninety-one. Speaker McCormack was first elected to the House in 1928 during the closing days of the Coolidge administration and served until 1971, when he retired at the midpoint of President Richard Nixon’s first term, at the age of seventy-nine.

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When the photograph was taken, John McCormack was seventy-one and Carl Hayden was eighty-six. Lyndon Johnson, who had served with both men in their respective chambers, was only fifty-five. President Johnson suffered from a well-known heart condition, which had kept him out of the 1956 presidential nominating contest; and it was an ailment that would end his life, at the relatively young age of sixty-four, in 1973.

In his compilation of President Johnson's tape recordings, Michael Beschloss reported, "Many Americans were frightened at the sight of the two elderly men next in line for the presidency behind LBJ, who had once suffered a massive heart attack."¹

To disinterested observers of the photograph, Speaker McCormack and Senator Hayden seemed to represent the ghosts of "Congress Past." But they had become the ghosts of Congress Present and most likely, Congress Yet-to-Come.

In an effort to diminish the likelihood of either of these two gaining the presidency through the legislated line of succession, Democratic Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana proposed a constitutional amendment entitled the Presidential Succession and Disability Amendment. This amendment would allow Congress to fill the vice presidency if it became vacant and to limit the operation of the 1947 Presidential Succession Act, which placed the Speaker and the Senate president pro tempore right behind the vice president. To hammer home his point about the necessity of the amendment, the fateful 1963 photograph graced the cover of Senator Bayh's book, *One Heartbeat Away*.²

It worked, and the Twenty-fifth Amendment was ratified on February 23, 1967, one year and ten months after Congress had approved it and sent it to the states for ratification. The time it took to move through the state legislatures was close to the median of other constitutional amendments. The photograph had alerted, but had not panicked, the nation.

Once the solution had been implemented, Senator Hayden was spared further speculation about his fitness for the presidency. Speaker McCormack was not so fortunate. Questions raised during his tenure continued to dog his speakership, which McCormack had to defend for much of his time in the chair, and motions to oust him surfaced frequently during his last years in the post.³

Twenty-eight years have passed since Speaker McCormack left the House and nineteen years have passed since his death, but he remains the least well known of the Speakers of the past half century.

From 1962 through 1970, Boston's John W. McCormack served as the forty-fourth Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Although he was a major legislative architect of both the New Deal and the Great Society, he is still relatively unknown. That was the plan.

It is my contention that John McCormack enjoyed and took pains to preserve his relative public obscurity. He was a very private man in a public office. In the words of his longtime assistant, Dr. Martin Sweig, "John McCormack was the most secretive man I have ever met."⁴ Why? Therein lies the tale.

The Austin-Boston Speakers

From 1940 through 1989, the House of Representatives had only six Speakers: Sam Rayburn, Joe Martin, John McCormack, Carl Albert, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., and Jim Wright. Five were Democrats with Joseph Martin of Massachusetts the only Republican. McCormack and O'Neill were also from Massachusetts, Rayburn and Wright

were from Texas, and Albert was from an Oklahoma district just across the Red River from Rayburn's Texas district.

During this same half century, there were ten presidents and six Chief Justices of the Supreme Court. The presidents were born in eight states and elected from nine. The Chief Justices were born in six states and chosen from five. The Speakers were born in four states but elected from only three.

That an elective political institution with the shortest fixed term of any national world legislature would have so few presiding officers is not the least of the House leadership's many ironies. That a national political institution with a constitutionally mandated requirement that its membership reflect population shifts should have been presided over by members from only three of the nation's fifty states enriches the irony. And that the one Speaker, John W. McCormack, whose public leadership career in that body spanned more than thirty years of the half century, remains unknown to the American public turns irony to mystery. Fourteen biographies and autobiographies cover the lives and public careers of five Austin-Boston Speakers: six about Rayburn, three each for Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright, and one each for Joe Martin and Carl Albert.⁵ But none on John McCormack! Is it because McCormack was unimportant and irrelevant to the politics of his time? No. Or because he chose not to share the full dimensions of his life so little known? That would appear to be the case.

John McCormack "in the Room"

For almost forty years, John McCormack was near the epicenter of political power in the nation. The most fascinating aspect of McCormack's life is not his oft-told rags-to-riches Horatio Algerish rise from the Boston Irish tenements to the Speaker's chair on Capitol Hill but the fact that McCormack was in the room for so many major political events that altered the course of American life.⁶

Consider the following:

- 1928 — John McCormack was elected to the U.S. House to fill the unexpired term of the late Congressman James A. Gallivan, Democrat of Massachusetts, and to the subsequent term.
- 1931 — At the urging of newly installed Speaker John Nance ("Cactus Jack") Garner, John McCormack ran for a seat on the Ways and Means Committee. At the time, the Democratic members of Ways and Means served as "the committee on committees" for the other Democrats. McCormack finished second among the members elected to the new vacancies, ahead of Fred Vinson, Democrat of Kentucky, later secretary of the treasury and Chief Justice of the United States. Vinson was a poker pal of McCormack's.⁷
- 1933 — President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal measures moved quickly through the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee on which McCormack was a senior member. These were the "hundred days."
- 1934 — The House named its first Special Committee on Un-American Activities to investigate native fascist and communist movements. At the urging of Democratic Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York, McCormack was chosen as chair.⁸

- 1937 — Commerce Committee chair Sam Rayburn, a New Deal supporter, was elected House Majority Floor Leader over Rules Committee chair John J. O'Connor, Democrat of New York, a New Deal opponent, with the help of northern urban Catholic votes provided by John McCormack.⁹
- 1940 — Working closely with conservative Virginia Congressman Howard W. Smith, McCormack helped write the controversial Alien Registration Act, known as the Smith Act, which required all foreigners to register and be fingerprinted. It also made it unlawful to be a member of any organization that advocated the overthrow of the government by force or violence or to advocate or conspire to advocate such overthrow.¹⁰
- 1940 — Sam Rayburn succeeded Will Bankhead, Democrat of Alabama, as Speaker, and John McCormack succeeded Rayburn as House Majority Floor Leader. McCormack defeated Virginia Democrat Clifton Woodrum in the Democratic caucus with the help of Georgia Democrat Eugene "Goober" Cox, an avowed segregationist.¹¹ Cox was another poker pal of McCormack's. Once elected, Rayburn and McCormack served as the House's top two Democrats for twenty-one years and never had a vote recorded against them.
- 1941 — Newly elected Majority Leader John McCormack was asked by President Roosevelt to be the House floor manager for the \$7 billion Lend-Lease bill, which was intended to rescue Britain from the Axis powers. The fear of anti-British feelings among urban American Irish Democrats caused the role of McCormack to be considered pivotal in managing this bill through the House.¹²
- 1941 — Majority Floor Leader McCormack introduced the resolution of war against Japan and the other Axis powers, Germany and Italy.
- 1944 — Speaker Sam Rayburn, Majority Leader John McCormack, and Minority Leader Joe Martin were briefed by Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and Director of Scientific Research Vannevar Bush on the Manhattan Project. They were urged to appropriate money for the atomic bomb project without the public's knowledge or congressional scrutiny.¹³
- 1944 — The Democratic National Convention again nominated FDR but replaced Vice President Henry A. Wallace with Democratic Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri. Senator Truman played poker with Majority Leader McCormack, who chaired the 1944 Platform Committee.¹⁴
- 1945 — When President Roosevelt died, Vice President Truman received a call from the White House while seated with Speaker Rayburn in the "Board of Education," the Speaker's Capitol Hill hideaway.¹⁵ Majority Leader McCormack had left the House floor to join them, but Truman had departed to learn his fate. Later that evening McCormack and other key officials attended President Truman's swearing-in by Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone.
- 1947 — Minority Whip John McCormack circulated a petition among House members to urge President Truman to pardon ex-representative and newly elected Boston Mayor James Michael Curley for mail fraud,

- enabling him to leave prison to serve his fourth term. Many House members signed the petition. Only one Massachusetts Democrat, John F. Kennedy, who had succeeded Curley in the seat, refused.¹⁶
- 1949 — Majority Leader John McCormack arranged the return of segregationist Democrat William Colmer of Mississippi to the Rules Committee over the opposition of Speaker Sam Rayburn. But at the same time, McCormack, whose committee service was optional, remained on the Expenditures Committee, averting a southern walkout when William Dawson of Chicago was installed as the first-ever black chair of a congressional committee.
 - 1952 — Congressman John F. Kennedy challenged the reelection of the incumbent Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Kennedy's father, former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, was considered a "defeatist" who was too accepting of a World War II Nazi victory in Europe. John McCormack, a longtime favorite of Jewish voters, was known as Rabbi John. He campaigned vigorously for the young Kennedy in the Jewish wards of Boston, helping him to gain a 70,000 Democratic vote plurality over Lodge in spite of General Dwight D. Eisenhower's 209,000 Republican vote plurality over Illinois Governor Adlai E. Stevenson.¹⁷
 - 1956 — After a losing battle with the Kennedy forces for control of the state party chairmanship, John McCormack won the state's presidential preference primary and led the Massachusetts delegation to the Democratic National Convention when the state's junior U.S. senator, John F. Kennedy, made his failed bid for the vice presidency.
 - 1958 — The Soviets launched Sputnik, an earth-orbiting satellite. When a panicked American nation turned to the Congress for help, the House of Representatives created the Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration and John McCormack was named its chair.¹⁸ Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas headed the Senate panel.
 - 1960 — Senator John F. Kennedy selected John McCormack to manage his nomination on the convention floor. McCormack, a friend to both Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, helped put together the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, which won the closest election in the twentieth century and installed the nation's first Roman Catholic president. Robert Kennedy and Rayburn opposed the ticket for different reasons. Bobby Kennedy wanted either Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington State or Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri for the ticket, while Rayburn, aware of Vice President John Garner's unhappiness on the job, tried to spare Johnson of its frustrations. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy wanted Johnson, and McCormack helped deliver him to the ticket.¹⁹
 - 1961 — With the final illness and eventual death of Speaker Sam Rayburn, John McCormack became the acting Speaker. This same year, McCormack was approached by Ambassador Kennedy with a simple proposition to gain the Senate nomination for his youngest son, Teddy, and a gubernatorial nomination for the Speaker's nephew Eddie.²⁰ The ambassador's stroke in December voided the deal.
 - 1962 — John McCormack was elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the first Roman Catholic to assume that position.

- 1962 — Ted Kennedy and Ed McCormack engaged in a fratricidal Teddy-Eddie contest for the Senate nomination. A bruising debate at South Boston High School led to Ed McCormack's denunciation of Ted Kennedy, which backfired, and Kennedy gained the nomination by a two-to-one margin.²¹
- 1963 — John F. Kennedy's assassination placed seventy-one-year-old Speaker John McCormack next in line to President Lyndon Johnson for fourteen months. Because that prospect discomfited many Americans, the Twenty-fifth Amendment, allowing the vice presidency to be filled by presidential appointment with confirmation by the Congress, was ratified quickly.
- 1964 — Speaker John McCormack presided over the Democratic National Convention, which nominated President Lyndon Johnson and Senator Hubert Humphrey, Democrat of Minnesota, as its ticket. Johnson and Humphrey captured forty-four states and the District of Columbia with more than 61 percent of the vote, the highest percentage of the two-party era.²²
- 1965 — Speaker McCormack presided over the House when the first session of the 89th Congress gave LBJ a record-setting 93 percent success rate for his Great Society legislative measures, including Medicare and Medicaid. This session rivaled the 1933 "hundred days" for legislative accomplishment, when McCormack had also served.²³
- 1967 — Speaker McCormack was sued by ousted African-American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Democrat of New York, after the latter was denied his seat and the chairmanship of the House Education and Labor Committee. The U.S. Supreme Court granted Powell his seat, but the House refused to let him resume his chairmanship.²⁴
- 1969 — Speaker McCormack was challenged within the Democratic caucus by Arizona Congressman Morris Udall, the first to a sitting Speaker since 1923. McCormack won renomination in the caucus handily by a vote of 178 to 58.²⁵
- 1970 — McCormack completed nine consecutive years as Speaker, the longest consecutive speakership on record. It remained in place until 1986, when his protégé, Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., completed his tenth consecutive year.

Why was John McCormack always in the room? The reasons were both political and personal.

The Political Dimension: Containing the Race Question

On the political level, the longtime Austin-Boston linkage between John McCormack's Massachusetts and Sam Rayburn's Texas was no surprise. Texas is the largest southern state with the smallest black population, and Boston is the largest northern city with the smallest black population. Southerners with few blacks in their districts did not have to engage in racist posturing, which made it possible for them to have Catholic, Jewish, liberal, northern, and even black friends. They could deal with the disparate elements of

the Democratic coalition without an electoral backlash in their districts.²⁶

Boston is the northern urban analogue of this phenomenon. The decade-ending censuses of the 1950s and 1960s revealed that the city ranked twelfth in the 1960 Census and eleventh in the 1970 Census in the proportion of blacks in the “core city” of the twelve largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the country. These were the decades of John McCormack’s power.

Without a sizable number of blacks in their districts, Boston-area representatives were not obliged to become advocates for civil rights issues. As Martin Sweig, McCormack’s legislative assistant, recalled, “John McCormack never made a civil rights speech, but he always voted for civil rights bills.”²⁷ Voting for civil rights bills would not have antagonized the South; speaking for civil rights would have.

Boston-area members were able to accommodate some of the more vocal and vehement racists who have sat in the House. McCormack’s best friend in that body was Eugene “Goober” Cox of Georgia, a leading segregationist.

McCormack was in a position to negotiate with southern hard-liners without fear of electoral retribution back home. Their ability to finesse the race question was what made the original Austin-Boston speakership of Rayburn and McCormack so powerful. This was because it was — and is — the race question that more than any other has disrupted the Democratic Party.

Presidential politics within the Democratic Party has been plagued by the race question. It was the race question that forced Democratic nominating conventions to adopt the two-thirds rule for selecting their presidential candidates in 1835.²⁸ This rule, which gave the South a veto over presidential nominees, was maintained for almost a century. It was the race question that led to two separate Democratic nominating conventions in 1860. It was the race question that resulted in 103 ballots at the 1924 convention.

In the postwar years, it was the race question that led to the southern delegates’ assembling after the 1948 convention to create the Dixiecrat presidential candidacy of South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond, the loyalty oath battle at the 1952 convention, the independent elector movement in the 1960 election for Virginia Senator Harry Flood Byrd, and the presidential candidacies of Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1964, 1968, and 1972. The Willie Horton campaign against Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in the 1988 election was the most recent dramatic example of racial politics playing havoc with Democratic presidential fortunes.

But the House remained relatively unaffected by these issues, and the Democrats were able to hold on to it for sixty of the sixty-four years between 1931 and 1995. Knowing that the race question has been the tiger by the tail within the Democratic Party, the Democratic House leaders sought to manage, control, and contain this most vehement and volatile of all the issues with which the party has had to contend in its lengthy existence. The best way to accomplish this goal was to bring into the leadership the members who could accommodate the race question: representatives from districts that permitted them sufficient flexibility to have friends on both sides of this issue. Members from Texas and Massachusetts — Austin and Boston — met the requirement. These leaders could direct the House of Representatives to contain the race question but not to address it.

The Personal Dimension: Poverty and Probity

On the personal level, John McCormack was a mainstay in the room because he was reliable. As a lifelong teetotaler, he always had his wits about him and remembered everything. As a Boston Irishman, McCormack could keep secrets. As a devout Roman

Catholic, he valued loyalty above all other virtues. He needed no press attention to feel good about himself. His solid marriage of fifty-one years provided him with all the emotional sustenance he needed. His background of poverty led him to value minor financial comforts and the steadiness of a job that lasted forty-two years. His modesty, his frugality, and his integrity made McCormack the moral compass of the House.

Furthermore, McCormack was a poor boy who had made good, a motif played out again and again among the Austin-Boston Speakers. It is true of Sam Rayburn, whose farmer father uprooted the family from the dwindling fields of Roane County in east Tennessee to the more productive ones of northeast Texas; of Joe Martin, whose blacksmith father made too little money to educate his oldest son; of Carl Albert, whose coal miner father had located in a community large enough to support only a one-room schoolhouse; of Tip O'Neill, who grew up the motherless son of a Boston Irish bricklayer; and of Jim Wright, whose itinerant father roamed through the Southwest as a traveling salesman. The shared hardships of their early lives united these men and sensitized them to the deprivations that continued in America and the role the federal government could play in alleviating them.

But John McCormack's life history was different. McCormack's early hardships were genuine, but the contours of his life were dramatically altered to gain public office in Boston, a city hopelessly fractured by ethnic and religious conflicts. McCormack had often told people of his early life, of a poor Irish-born immigrant father who died young, leaving John, the thirteen-year-old oldest son, to care for his Irish-born mother and two younger siblings.²⁹

In a May 18, 1971, interview shortly after leaving the speakership, McCormack recounted his early life. "Well, at the time of the death of my father I was a young man, a boy, thirteen years old. He was a stonemason. The family was left in very bad financial circumstances. I had graduated from the grammar school and I had to leave the grammar school to go to work in order to try to keep the family together. Our family consisted of my mother and two younger brothers."³⁰

It was a powerful, frequently retold story. The greatest of this century's Boston Irish politicians — four-time Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, the presumed hero of the classic novel, *The Last Hurrah*, and both of President John F. Kennedy's grandfathers, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and Patrick "P.J." Kennedy — had identical stories. The power of this tale of Irish fathers, widowed mothers, and younger siblings had elevated them to positions of high station within Irish Boston.

The Boston Irish Gatekeepers

The politics of Irish Boston both before and after the European war was dominated by local factions.³¹ Commanding and competing personalities set the tone for Irish Boston's political life. The best-known and most powerful were mayors and U.S. congressmen, John F. Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley, and state senators, Martin Lomasney, the ward boss of Boston's West End, and Patrick Joseph Kennedy, the leader of the most successful machine in East Boston.³²

Their life histories were remarkably similar.

- From the North End, John F. Fitzgerald — mother, Rose Mary Murray, and father, Tom Fitzgerald, both of County Wexford; both emigrated in the 1840s. Father Tom was a farmer in South Acton and later became a

grocer and liquor store owner in the North End; Tom died three years after Rose's death, when Johnny was eighteen. John was the third of seven boys, two of whom died at an early age. He graduated from Boston Latin but had to drop out of Harvard Medical School to support the younger boys. His first job was as a clerk at the Customs House.

- From the West End, Martin Lomasney — mother, Mary Murray, born in Lismore, County Waterford, and father, Maurice Lomasney, born in Fermoy, County Cork. They married when she was thirty and he was thirty-four. Of four sons, only two, Martin and Joseph, survived. Their father died when Martin was eleven, shortly followed in death by their mother. Martin and Joseph lived with their maternal grandmother, who spoke only Gaelic, and aunt. He left school in the sixth grade to work at a railway station selling newspapers.
- From East Boston, Patrick J. Kennedy — mother, Bridget Murphy, and father, Patrick Kennedy, both born in County Wexford. They were married in the United States and had four children, three daughters and a son. The senior Patrick was dead at thirty-five, shortly after the birth of his only son. Never finishing grade school, P.J., in his teens, began to work as a stevedore and longshoreman; he eventually took over a bar in Haymarket Square and moved into the retail liquor business.
- From Roxbury and South Boston, James Michael Curley — mother, Sarah Clancy, and father, Michael Curley, both from County Galway; immigrated to the United States as teenagers. They married when he was twenty-one and she was nineteen. Of their three babies, only two survived, John and James Michael. Father Michael, a hod carrier, died in 1884 at the age of thirty-four when James Michael was only ten. Young James Michael sold newspapers and worked as a clerk in a drugstore.

Death at an early age befell their fathers and many of their brothers. Their time horizons were not long ones. If they seemed to be young men in a hurry to scamper up the political ladder in search of power and security, one should not be surprised. Early death among their most beloved family members had robbed them of the sense of invulnerability so prevalent among the adolescents from more privileged corners of the city.

These were the men that young John McCormack had to impress if he was to become a player in Boston city politics. It was these men whose life experiences had made them tough and cynical. It was these men to whom John McCormack would present himself and his altered ancestry.

The Reinvention Process

To escape the desperation of his early life, John McCormack would rewrite his life story to match those of the gatekeepers by ascending to the heights they had already scaled and even surpass them. He would eventually sit in the Speaker's chair of the House of Representatives, ranking only behind the vice president in the presidential line of succession. From the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the installation of Vice President Hubert Humphrey in January 1965, McCormack was only a heartbeat away from the presidency.

His childhood in Boston was hard. By the time he was seventeen, the annual edition

of *The Boston City Directory* had recorded for the McCormacks fourteen places of residence within a six-block radius in Andrew Square, a rough-edged crossroads linking South Boston to Dorchester. In an area filled with three-deckers and tightly packed houses, one ricocheted around Andrew Square to beat the rent. Landlords' tolerance for families grown beyond their incomes was never great. How many other places the McCormack family had occupied during these years is unknown, but there is little doubt that these moves were made a day in advance of the landlord and two days ahead of the sheriff.

Before he was twenty, McCormack had stood three times over the graves of the siblings closest in age to him, two brothers and a sister whose lungs could not withstand the horrors of tuberculosis. His poverty and misery were real, but the other aspects of his life as he described it were not.

McCormack's father, Joseph, a Scottish-descended Canadian, was not born in Ireland. Joe was born near Grant's Crossing in Souris, Prince Edward Island, had been married once before, and had a son, Harry, by his deceased first wife, Margaret. John McCormack's mother, Mary Ellen O'Brien, was born in Boston, not in Ireland. Mary Ellen, who was pregnant twelve times, carried only eight babies to full term. Two died in infancy, but six — Patrick, Catherine, James, John, Edward, and Donald — lived long enough to be enumerated by the census. Of these, three grown siblings, young adults seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-four years of age, predeceased their mother. Joe McCormack did not die in 1905, when John was a thirteen-year-old South Boston newsboy, but in 1929, when the thirty-seven-year-old congressman was serving his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Unraveling the Fabrication

Tombstones tell tales. Not only do they indicate the final whereabouts of those lying beneath them, but they are intended to leave the living with a memorial to lives that have passed before them and remind them of their own mortality. Tombstones also reveal the character and history of the deceased's survivors, who pay to have the stones erected and inscribed.

Boston's most prestigious graveyards are downtown, two blocks from the crest of Beacon Hill where the majestic Bulfinch-designed State House looks down on the bustling metropolis the city has become. Part of Boston's allure and much of its curse lie within the graveyards of King's Chapel and the Old Granary where lie the city's Puritan aristocracy who brought equal helpings of enlightenment and prejudice to this unique place. In the words of John Winthrop's 1630 sermon on the *Arbella*, Boston was intended to be "a city on a hill" radiating its goodness throughout the New World and reflecting back to the Old World that a band of educated and devout worshipers could create a Christian community that would serve as a model of renewal and salvation for the benighted and decadent civilizations of Europe.³³

Tombstones assisted in the reinvention of Boston's John McCormack; the unraveling of his tale begins with three tombstones found in the farther reaches of Boston. The first tombstone is located in Sandbanks, a small cemetery occupying a corner of Watertown on the Cambridge line. It is dwarfed by the adjacent Mount Auburn Cemetery, where the luminaries of Massachusetts intellectual life have been laid to rest. Close by Harvard University, Mount Auburn is the last resting place of many of the school's most illustrious scholars and famed graduates, for example, Louis Agassiz, who founded Radcliffe

College, the essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Supreme Court justices Joseph Story and Felix Frankfurter, U.S. senators Edward Everett and Charles Sumner, poets James Russell Lowell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, as well as Julia Ward Howe, who wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mount Auburn has been wonderfully landscaped with gardens, small ponds, and flowered walkways leading to the mausoleums and graves of its occupants.

Part of the landscaping included the 1920 erection of a large, thick ten-foot wall on the Cambridge-Watertown line separating the garden cemetery of Mount Auburn from Sandbanks. It was intended to provide a clear boundary between the growing burial needs of Mount Auburn and the diminishing ones of Sandbanks. The wall was built shortly after the city's bitter and ethnically divisive Boston Police Strike of 1919. Coincidence perhaps? Perhaps not.

The 1906 death certificate of James J. McCormack, the first of John McCormack's adolescent siblings to die, indicates that James was a victim of "phthisis." This was one of the many cover-up names for tuberculosis, that lung-destroying contagious disease that haunted poor immigrant families, laid waste to their vulnerable young, and forever scarred the family survivors with the mark of shame of poverty and disease.

The certificate stated that James was buried in "Mt. Auburn Cemetery (Watertown)." My call to Mount Auburn Cemetery in search of James's gravesite elicited an unmistakable response. After being told that James J. McCormack was not located in Mount Auburn Cemetery, I was asked, "Was he a Catholic?" Replying in the affirmative, I was told that his likely gravesite was in Sandbanks, which was not a part of Mount Auburn, and that I should call another number in nearby Waltham, where information about the occupants of Sandbanks could be found.

At the diocesan office in Waltham, I received a map of the graveyard, and a search of the old record book indicated that the seventeen-year-old James Joseph McCormack would be found in grave C of the fifth row in the East Range. Finding Sandbanks is not easy. Cottage Street in Watertown has no street sign, so I took the first left after crossing the city line behind Mount Auburn. The cemetery was barely visible at the end of the street. One's first visit to Sandbanks does not impress. No street sign or guidepost leads to it. No sign on the gates indicates its unique past nor do the gates fit well on their rusted hinges. It is one of Boston's oldest Irish Catholic cemeteries, and unlike that of nearby Mount Auburn, with its nonsectarian cast, its land has been consecrated.

The Sandbanks Cemetery office, which last took orders for burial in 1947, is now closed; only those for whom plots were purchased years ago have been buried there in the past half century. Maintenance has slipped. Many of the stones are askew and some are broken. A longtime maintenance man who cares for three cemeteries told me that one can sometimes feel from Sandbanks a chill that is absent elsewhere. It was he who alerted me to the presence of the ten-foot wall separating the two cemeteries. "The Protestants built that wall to keep us from them," he declaimed in a tone both softened by an Irish brogue and hardened by the realization that the two defining cultures of this city on a hill had to remain separated even in death.

Once I arrived at Sandbanks, locating James's gravesite was less difficult. The cemetery map had accurately captured its unique land configuration, and the ten-foot wall separating it from Mount Auburn was there in all its peculiar majesty. The thick concrete wall gives Mount Auburn the appearance of a fortress. It is not a simple line of demarcation.

No tombstone identified James's final location, but an unusually shaped oblong block near grave C indicated that a Julia O'Brien had erected a tombstone with two of its sides inscribed. The facing side reads

Erected by Julia O'Brien
in memory of her son
Patrick J. O'Brien
b. Boston May 18, 1853
d. Rochester, N.Y.
October 17, 1882

The left side reads

Michael J. O'Brien
b. Boston June 5, 1819
d. Boston October 13, 1881

Many Sandbanks tombstones are inscribed with the birthplaces of those beneath them. Of the hundreds so recorded, most identify a parish in faraway Ireland. Tombstones identifying local parishes in the counties of Mayo and Galway in the western kingdom of Connaught, the counties of Wexford and Wicklow in the eastern kingdom of Leinster, and even parishes from the northern Irish Ulster region such as Tyrone, Armagh, and Enniskellen may be found there. But it is the southern kingdom of Munster that has most populated the cemetery with its dead. The counties of Cork and Kerry prevail among the departed Irish of Sandbanks.

Only a small handful of tombstones in Sandbanks carry American birthplaces, and one of these few was the curious oblong erected and inscribed by Julia O'Brien to memorialize her husband and son. The tombstone contained an inaccuracy, for Michael J. O'Brien was not born in Boston. According to census records, Michael O'Brien was born in Ireland, but Julia Devereux O'Brien had made her husband a Bostonian by inscribing Boston as both his place of birth and his place of death on his tombstone. Why?

Julia and Michael O'Brien were the parents of Mary Ellen O'Brien McCormack. Their names are on Mary Ellen's 1885 marriage license, both in the Boston civil records and in the register at St. James the Greater Roman Catholic Church. Michael was dead before Mary Ellen married Joe McCormack, but Julia lived to see Mary Ellen's four surviving babies, the last of whom was John William McCormack. She was the grandmother of James J. McCormack, who would remain seventeen forever. Mary Ellen's 1913 death certificate lists the names of another set of parents, Patrick O'Brien and Bridget Daley, both of Ireland. John, as Mary Ellen's oldest surviving son, would have given this information to the funeral home.

It is possible that John did not know the names of his maternal grandparents. Michael O'Brien had died before John was born, and Julia died when he was less than a year old. However, John was fourteen when James was buried in plot C5A of Sandbanks, and he stood beside the tombstone of Michael and Patrick O'Brien erected by grandmother Julia. John was well aware of how his grandmother had reinvented his grandfather as a Bostonian. John knew that this inscription had literally been chiseled in stone.

When John came to fill out his own mother's death certificate seven years later, he chose not to identify Michael and Julia O'Brien as his mother's parents but rather took

the names of two deceased South Boston neighbors, Patrick O'Brien and Bridget Daley, and entered them on his mother's death certificate. It was a dangerous move, but John and his two younger brothers, Edward and Donald, had stood silently over the graves of five siblings, four of whom were grown, two in Canada and three in Boston. Now that they had buried their mother, there was no generational barrier between them and their own mortality. The document was partially true. Mary Ellen's parents had been born in Ireland — it says so in the 1900 Census. But the names of her parents on her death certificate were untrue.

John McCormack was now only twenty-one years old, and the burden of protecting his two surviving brothers from the deadly fate that had befallen so many others in the family was uppermost in his mind. Grandma Julia understood that to be Irish in nineteenth-century Boston jeopardized the welfare of a family. McCormack understood that to be Irish in twentieth-century Boston was essential for survival.

Those who arrived in Boston from Ireland in the years before the Civil War had to confront the Yankee ascendancy in its fullest glory. Boston's industry and commerce were thriving and its literary output staggered belief. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry David Thoreau extended Boston's intellectual reach throughout North America and the entire English-speaking world. These Boston Yankees were clearly superior beings, but who were these Irish people? What were they doing here? Why had they come to this center of enlightenment?

Even that most cherished of Yankee intellectuals, Henry David Thoreau, who empathized with all God's creatures, displayed remarkable callousness and condescension to his Irish neighbors, the Fields, on Walden Pond. To Thoreau, who had often come to the spot in the woods where the Fields settled long before "the ship was built that floated this family to America," his disdain was palpable:

"An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field; and his wife . . . with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible any where."³⁴

The insensitive Thoreau described the infant child of the Fields as a "poor starveling brat" and any serious discussion with one of John Field's ancestry was doomed. "But alas! the culture of an Irishman is an enterprise to be undertaken with a moral bog hoe."³⁵

There was no welcome in Boston for the Irish, so concealing an Irish birthplace was essential for economic survival, and both Michael and Julia O'Brien knew this well. It was the time of the NINA employment signs — No Irish Need Apply. In a jaunty doggerel rejoinder to these signs, it was often intoned as "Whoe'er writ it, writ it well, the same is writ on the gates of Hell, 'No Irish Need Apply.'"

But for fourteen-year-old John McCormack, standing over this open grave with his brothers, Patrick, Edward, and Donald, and his sister, Catherine, sadness overhung the cold February morning. On this day, Mary Ellen bade farewell to the first of her three grown children who would predecease her. No tombstone was placed there, but it was close enough to the graves of her parents, Michael and Julia O'Brien, and their son, Patrick, for whom her oldest son was named. It may have been her only consolation that day. James's father, Joseph H. McCormack, did not accompany his wife and the five remaining children to the gravesite. He had left the family apartment sometime the previous year and his whereabouts were unknown. Now they were six.

Some thought that Joe McCormack had probably returned to his native Prince Edward Island, the smallest of Canada's Maritime Provinces. Others believed that he

was in an alcoholic haze in some town along the northern route between Boston and PEI. Perhaps he was dead. Who knows? Who cares? Where he went or why he left mattered little to this hardy band of Boston Irishmen he left behind. Joe McCormack was dead to them.

John McCormack learned a number of important lessons that day, one being that Yankee Boston needed to separate itself even from dead Irishmen. Another was that altering a family history to escape poverty and gain employment was no sin. It was good enough for grandma Julia and it would be good enough for John when he, too, had to alter the details of his family history.

Three months later, in May, deadly news struck again. Catherine Amelia, the only daughter, had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. The horror returned quickly to the household. The slender, pretty blond girl, known as Kitty to the cousins, was only eighteen when the fatal diagnosis was delivered. Five months later, early in October 1906, the McCormack family reassembled to bury Catherine Amelia, her mother's greatest confidante in this family of five boys and a father given to alcohol-induced rages and absences. Now they were five.

The family was more prepared for this death than they had been for that of James. They had purchased a cemetery plot for Catherine in Mount Benedict Cemetery in West Roxbury. It was at one of the far rural ends of the city, but it was Catholic, it was new, and it was clearly a cut above Sandbanks.

John McCormack, who had left school in June at the age of fourteen, was now employed full time as a messenger boy for the Boston Curb Exchange. I doubt if he realized that his first major outlay as a full-time worker was to cover the cost of a cemetery plot for his only sister. But sometimes there are no choices. On this October morning, the four remaining siblings, Patrick, John, Edward, and Donald, gathered at their sister's grave. It was a wonderfully crisp New England fall day, but it is doubtful if any of those present took notice. Once again, Mary Ellen McCormack stood alone over her daughter's grave with no comfort from her husband, Catherine's father.

McCormack's initial full-time job led to his discovery by a Boston lawyer, William T. Way of Plymouth, who had an office in the city. By 1911, McCormack had been elevated to a clerk in Way's office and was eagerly devouring the law books on Way's shelves. But death struck once again. This time it was twenty-four year-old Patrick, his oldest brother, whose tubercular lungs would also fail. Now they were four.

Patrick was listed as a hostler, a stable hand, in the 1910 Census; his 1911 death certificate listed his occupation as clerk. What did it matter now? Once again the diminished family gathered at Mount Benedict, and Patrick, buried beside his sister, was the third of Mary Ellen McCormack's grown children to depart this life. Death had been a constant companion in the harsh forty-nine years of her life and twenty-four years of her motherhood.

Two years later Mary Ellen was next, dead of chronic nephritis exacerbated by tuberculosis. Because she did not have the coughing and wheezing symptoms most common to the disease known as consumption, it was not known that she also had succumbed to this shameful ailment. Nor did any family member make the connection between the altered household sleeping arrangements instituted following the 1905 departure of Joe McCormack and the spread of the disease. Sister Catherine had shared her mother's bed and Catherine's bed had been given to James Joseph. Mary Ellen carried the dying sixteen-year-old James Joseph from his sickbed to the toilet. In other cultures and societies, eighteen-year-old Catherine would have handled this difficult chore, but among the

Catholic Irish, native or Boston-born, any intimacy among young adults was prohibited. Brothers and sisters were not exempt from this proscription. The misinformation surrounding James Joseph's ailment led the family to believe that he did not have the dreaded and highly contagious TB bacillus. With Catherine sleeping beside her, Mary Ellen carried the fatal disease from her son to her daughter.

The three younger boys, John, Edward, and Daniel, all slept in the same bed. The time the boys spent away from the apartment in South Boston's John A. Andrew School and playing outdoors had spared them from succumbing to the contagion. Mary Ellen McCormack was not aware of any of this, and in 1913 her time had come. Thank God. It is doubtful whether she could have buried yet another child.

In 1913, John McCormack and his two remaining brothers buried their mother in Mount Benedict alongside her oldest son and only daughter. Again, Joe McCormack did not appear at the funeral. The boys knew that he was alive somewhere, but they never knew if he would return. So on their mother's 1913 death certificate, Mary Ellen McCormack's marital status is listed M for married, not W for widowed. Joe, gone for eight years, was dead to the boys if not yet to God.

Now they were three: John, twenty-one, Edward, seventeen, and Donald just fourteen, three fatherless boys who had just buried their mother. In a city with little compassion for its ethnic poor, despair might have been the expected boys' response. But John would not be denied. He was about to pass the bar examination and he would have a professional credential to make his way in Boston. But which Boston? Yankee or Irish?

Making It in Massachusetts

From those who aspired to ascend its economic and social ladders, Yankee Boston required Puritan ancestry and a Harvard degree. John McCormack knew that genealogists had long lists of Mayflower descendants and that the Harvard Alumni Association had long lists of all the college's students past and present. These lists were zealously guarded to prevent any interloper from making a false claim to advance himself inappropriately. John of course knew that since his name was not on either list, Yankee Boston was inaccessible. He would make his ascent from Andrew Square through Irish Boston.

Irish Boston's requirements were less strict than Yankee Boston's. Documentation was not necessary but it helped. Being Catholic, a given, was essential. The successful combination of life experiences for advancement within Irish Boston was being the son of an Irish immigrant and having a widowed mother with younger siblings to support. These were the family histories of the great political gatekeepers of the Boston Irish — the inscrutable Martin Lomasney of the West End, the irrepressible James Michael Curley of South Boston and Roxbury, and President John F. Kennedy's grandfathers. John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald of the North End and Patrick J. "P.J." Kennedy of East Boston.

McCormack had learned early on that talent, ability, and compassion were insufficient for political advancement in ethnically-conscious Boston. During his 1906–1913 apprenticeship in the law office of William T. Way, his Yankee benefactor, and in the three years following, McCormack had seen Way run unsuccessfully four times as a Democratic candidate from Plymouth — three times for the State House and once for the state Senate. Way, a Yankee Unitarian in an Irish Catholic party who ran as a Democrat from a Republican town, did not have the right stuff. McCormack learned graphically the importance of having it.

Did John McCormack have the right stuff for these people? The answer is a simple no. Joe McCormack was born in a Canadian Province, not in Ireland, which in South Boston made him a “two-boater” or “herring choker.” As Thomas H. O’Connor, a South Boston native and author of *The Boston Irish*, recounted to me, two-boaters were unwelcome, for jobs were scarce enough. “Rory, get the dory. There’s a herrin’ in the bay” was the anti-Maritimer refrain heard around Southie.³⁶ And — heaven forbid! — Joe McCormack may even have been a Scot!

Boss Martin Lomasney, the mahatma of ethnically diverse Ward Eight, was so sensitive about his Irish heritage that he was the only member of the 300-plus Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1917 to declare that he was the issue of “Irish parents.”³⁷ His rivals suggested that Martin Lomasney was a “Novey” because his father had once spent time in Nova Scotia. By the time Lomasney was eleven, in 1871, both his parents were gone; but Lomasney was so sensitive to these accusations that he carried his parents’ marriage license and his own birth certificate in his waistcoat for the next fifty years.³⁸ Lomasney’s possession of these official documents created difficulty for individuals who sought independent verification of his ancestry.³⁹

This ethnically charged climate hung over the city when John McCormack entered into public life. He had to be very careful.

Mary Ellen McCormack was born in Boston. Although her father had been born in Ireland, she was a native-born American. And contrary to the tale, John was not the oldest sibling. Patrick, Catherine, and James were past adolescence and into adulthood when Joe McCormack departed from the household. But desperation and ambition can work wonders, and McCormack set about to recast himself in the prevailing model of Irish Boston’s successful politicians. The Irish were in the political ascendancy and it would be in his best interest for McCormack to highlight those features of his life which emphasized his Irishness and to conceal those which did not. This would be the “greening” of John McCormack.

It was a lesson he had learned from the O’Brien tombstone in Sandbanks. Family histories could be altered if survival is at issue, so McCormack altered his history. Joe McCormack, born to a Scots-descended Canadian in Prince Edward Island, was trouble. He may have been dead to his surviving sons, but there was no certainty that he was truly dead and gone. Unbeknownst to the boys, he was living in Maine and, for twenty-four years after leaving Boston, had been working as a stonecutter in the granite quarries of Waldoboro. Joe died in 1929, while John was serving his first term in the U.S. House, not, as he told others, when he was a thirteen-year-old South Boston newsboy. John reinvented his father as a native Irishman who had died in 1905.

Mary Ellen O’Brien McCormack was also recast as a native of Ireland. It is doubtful whether she would have appreciated this posthumous relocation of her birthplace, but she would have understood why it was done. Patrick, Catherine, and James were recast as having died in infancy. That Patrick had been twenty-four, Catherine nineteen, and James seventeen when they died would have to be finessed. They may have been remembered by the McCormack brothers and their cousins but they would be lost to history.

It was a painful decision, but one that he had to make. So John told the story of the three McCormack brothers fending for themselves in times of hardship. To those who asked the Speaker about the other McCormack children, he would say only that all had died in infancy and childhood.

In 1966, Donald, his youngest brother, died in Texas, leaving John the family’s last

surviving son. Brother Edward, a colorful South Boston figure known as “Knocko,” had predeceased both of them in 1963, so it was left to John, who had become Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, to deal with Donald’s remains. McCormack had them flown to Boston and driven to Mount Benedict Cemetery and ordered the following inscription on the tombstone:

In Memory of My Mother

Mary

1861–1913

Donald J.

1901–1966

McCORMACK

Mary Ellen and Donald were memorialized on that tombstone, but Patrick and Catherine, who lay beside them, are not mentioned at all. McCormack knew they were there. He had lived with Catherine for fifteen years and with Patrick for twenty. He had stood over both their graves while his mother wept at their death. But he could not acknowledge their presence, for to do so would reveal that the altered life history which made it possible for him to ascend to the heights of Irish Boston was false. How could Speaker McCormack have grown siblings when he had told people throughout his district and in Washington that they had died in infancy? How indeed?

Leaving their names off his mother’s tombstone may have been the most difficult decision of his life at the moment of his greatest success. During the previous twelve months of 1965, McCormack had presided triumphantly over the House of Representatives during the first session of the 89th Congress, the Great Society Congress. Its legislative achievements of Medicare and Medicaid came close to President Lyndon Johnson’s goal of out-Roosevelting Franklin D. Roosevelt. Even at the zenith of his political power and influence, the half century of McCormack’s false life history had to remain in place.

If it was learned that John McCormack had lied about the ages of his deceased siblings, were there possibly other misstatements? Was his mother really born in Ireland as stated on Edward’s death certificate and John’s. Or was she born in Boston, as recorded on her own death certificate and those of James, Catherine, and Patrick and on the census returns of 1900 and 1910 and on all six of the birth notices of her enumerated children?

The Search for Joe McCormack

What of Joe McCormack? Who was he? What was he like? The evidence in Canada is consistently negative. Joe was regarded among his fellow Prince Edward Island townsmen as a drunk, a rake, a small-time swindler, and an abusive husband. One story is particularly telling. Around 1901, a pregnant Mary Ellen McCormack gathered her six children and fled from Boston to the farm of Thomas and Kate McCormack Haley near Souris, PEI, to escape Joe’s alcoholic rages. .

Kate Haley was the oldest daughter of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee McCormack, who raised Joe McCormack. Souris, on the east coast of Prince Edward Island in Kings County, is a small community of farmers and fishermen. Its soil lacks the richness of the arable land in the central county of Queens so lovingly described in

Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. Farm families in Souris export their children as well as their produce, for there is little of agricultural abundance there. The farms are small, mostly between fifty and one hundred acres. The Haley farm was smaller than most, a fifty-acre hillside property with a one-and-a-half-story farmhouse. It was barely large enough for Kate and Tom Haley, their own daughter Mary Ellen, the young farmhand, Archie Howlett, and the sickly Harry McCormack, the only child of Joe McCormack's first marriage and half-brother to Mary Ellen McCormack's children.

The dwelling was much too small for Mary Ellen's brood. Three adults and nine children in one small house stretched the meager resources of the Haleys and Mary Ellen's presence was not wholly welcome. A further tragedy befell Mary Ellen when the child she was carrying died.

News of her infant son's death reached Father Ronald Bernard McDonald, the parish priest of Saint Mary's in Souris, but he refused to bury the baby in consecrated ground because Mary Ellen had "abandoned the family home" in Boston.⁴⁰ Shortly afterward, Mary Ellen, her children, and the Haleys buried the baby's body in the field behind Saint Mary's Cemetery. Harry McCormack, the baby's eighteen-year-old half brother, followed in February 1902. Unlike the baby, he was given a tombstone and consecrated ground.

Word of Joe McCormack's impending arrival on the island led to another flight. Mary Ellen again gathered the children and left Souris to return to Boston. Neither she nor John ever returned to Prince Edward Island. To an intelligent and impressionable ten-year-old like John McCormack, the inhospitality of the Canadian townsmen toward his mother and his siblings may also have contributed to his desire to conceal his Canadian heritage. Forgiveness is in short supply when family survival is at stake.

Back in Boston, in 1902, Joe resumed his paternal role in the McCormack household. There were no more children and the coldness at the dinner table can only be imagined. The household moved again as Joe's economic deficiencies continued. Then he was gone.

According to family history, Joe McCormack died in 1905. However, there is no Massachusetts death certificate or Boston obituary, funeral mass, or cemetery plot to mark his passing.

Abandonment and desertion provided a further McCormack family shame to conceal. Failing fortunes and an ailing family had finally taken their toll on Joe. Married to a practicing Catholic wife from whom divorce was impossible, Joe opted for a poor man's divorce and abandoned his family to the hardships of urban life in America. He last appeared in the *City Directory* lists in 1910, but it was not death that removed Joe from Boston.

From 1905 to 1910, Mary Ellen continued to inform the *City Directory* that Joe was still living at home. But by the 1910 Census, Joe was no longer listed among the inhabitants of 47 Vinton Street in South Boston. Mary Ellen's anger at Joe's departure and her disappointment with her Canadian in-laws led her to provide the 1910 census taker with an altered history for the father of her four remaining sons. Rather than have her boys listed as having a Canadian father, they were given a paternal ancestry matching her own. The country from whence the father of the boys was listed was "Ire. English." Joe had become an English-speaking Irishman. Canada was vanishing from the family history.

One afternoon in 1905, Joe McCormack hopped the Boston & Maine Railroad and went north to gain employment as a stonecutter along the Atlantic's edge, which served

as the major corridor between Prince Edward Island and the city of Boston.

Joe did not totally disappear. One of the surviving Walsh cousins noted his reappearance in family correspondence. The most vivid recollection appears in a 1982 letter from Charlotte Walsh Hannaway to Edward McCormack, Jr., John McCormack's nephew and Knocko's son. Charlotte was the oldest daughter of Joe's favorite niece, Amy Keller Walsh, and her husband Chauncey Walsh, a plasterer. She was also the granddaughter of Sarah McCormack Keller, the younger of the two sisters whose family had raised Joe McCormack in Souris.

Young Charlotte Walsh observed Joe's visit to the family apartment with great fascination. As she wrote in a condolence letter to Ed McCormack in 1982,

Years ago your Grandfather came to Fields Corner and stayed with us saying he was going to see Jack in the morning to see if he could put him someplace. He had come from Maine where he had stayed for years. What a tragedy it was. What a handsome Man he was I couldn't take my eyes from him. So my Dad said "Joe, you can't go in to see Jack looking like that. Wear my suit" and so he did and the next morning he left in pa's suit. when he didn't come home or rather back to the house Ma called Jack and Jack said he had given him five dollars and he left. Jack said he would think of something for his Father but Joe went back to Maine.⁴¹

Joe McCormack returned to Waldoboro in Lincoln County, Maine, his final destination. Located along the old Boston & Maine Railroad line, \$2.50 away from Boston, Waldoboro is a small mining town arching along high-pitched hills with a few narrow streets. It is a worker's town and a Protestant town. Occasional efforts to organize a parish among the town's few Catholics had failed, and priests from nearby towns were called in to officiate at religious functions, but it was home to Joe McCormack. Waldoboro was close to the appropriately named city of Rockland, and its surrounding environs included the limestone quarries in Thomaston. Stoneworkers, many of whom were Canadian Scotsmen and Irishmen from Prince Edward Island, assembled in these towns along the Lincoln and Knox county borders.

Joe worked in the granite quarries along Route 1 and boarded with George and Viva Noyes. Viva would have driven Joe the fifteen miles to Rockland's Knox County Hospital on February 5, 1929, for treatment of his worsening bronchitis. Joe died of bronchial pneumonia the following day.⁴² Cracking rocks filled stonecutters' lungs with dust, ironically the industrial equivalent of the dreaded tuberculosis that years earlier shortened the lives of so many of Joe's children.

A fellow worker of Joe's came down from Waldoboro on the Boston & Maine to tell John McCormack the news of his father's passing, but McCormack was not there. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he was on the floor during that week in February. His Boston secretary relayed the news to him in Washington, but the prospect of returning to New England to bury a man he despised was an unpleasant task McCormack chose to avoid.

Joe McCormack's body had been removed from the hospital by Harold W. Flanders, Waldoboro's busiest undertaker, who received John McCormack's instructions. How McCormack characterized his feelings toward his father and what he instructed Flanders to do, although they are not known may easily be imagined. What is known is contained in the obituary published in the weekly *Lincoln County News* of February 14, 1929, which was that Joseph McCormack, late of Waldoboro, Maine, for the past twenty-five years, a native of Prince Edward Island, Canada, born in 1862, and a stonecutter, was laid to rest in the Waldoboro Rural Cemetery. His burial in a pauper's grave in the

unmarked town portion of the cemetery was omitted from the account.

Expectations of a Mass, a wake, and consecrated ground, the marks of a “decent burial” to Roman Catholics, appear to have been unrealized. None of the three Roman Catholic parishes in the area — Saint Bernard’s in Rockland, Saint Denis’s in North Whitefield, and the venerable Saint Patrick’s in Newcastle — provided a priest for the burial of Joe McCormack, the family deserter. He was interred out of the Flanders Funeral Home on a Saturday afternoon — perhaps in Chauncey Walsh’s unreturned suit — in a service conducted by the Reverend Henry O. Megert of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴³ Joe McCormack was not buried as a Catholic, but his gravesite was not one which John ever intended to visit. Harold Flanders, a non-Catholic, knew that and acted accordingly. John McCormack may never have known that his father was buried as a pauper, but he certainly knew that he was not buried as a Catholic. Joe McCormack was a person whose remains would never be placed in Boston’s Mount Benedict Cemetery close to those of John’s beloved mother, Mary Ellen, and his siblings buried beside her. So why trouble oneself over it?

McCormack failed to give his father a decent burial. Anger and bitterness prevented his following the commandment “Honor thy father.” He had failed to memorialize his brother and sister on the tombstone of the grave they shared with his mother. These were sins. He had knowingly and deliberately dealt improperly with his family’s dead.

Atonement and Achievement

Was anyone else aware of John McCormack’s reinvention and how he had to deal with his family’s dead to bring it about? Did he confess his family sins? We cannot know the answers to these questions for certain. But it is revealing to note that the two most common correspondents in McCormack’s papers at Boston University are J. Edgar Hoover, the longtime director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Richard Cardinal Cushing, the archbishop of Boston. Hoover needed to know everything, and once McCormack became first in the line of succession to President Johnson, any hint that McCormack was a Canadian, not a native-born American, would have rendered him ineligible to assume the presidency. Hoover knew.

And Cushing knew. Like McCormack, Cardinal Cushing had come up the hard way from the tough streets of South Boston. Like McCormack, Cushing’s educational attainments had been less than those of his peers. The two men understood each other. McCormack was a man of extraordinary rectitude, and the guilt and remorse of these family events must have troubled him greatly. So he and his confessor may have revisited this subject often when guilt and shame overtook McCormack and absolution was essential to help him deal with the immense government tasks that confronted him.

Did he live an exemplary life? Yes. No more devoted husband has ever sat in the House of Representatives. McCormack’s devotion to Harriet, his wife of fifty-one years, was not only legendary but true. In June 1968, during the forty-eighth year of their marriage, John wrote a simple note to his Harriet, who was then eighty-four years old and whose health, never very robust, was failing. He wrote this heartfelt message on his stationery from the Speaker’s rooms.

Darling Harriet:

My love for you is deep and intense. With your love, God has blessed me during our married life.

I again repeat my unlimited love for you.

Your Sweetheart,
John⁴⁴

McCormack would return to their two-room corner suite on the eighth floor of the Hotel Washington that very night, as he had every night of their years together, to dine with Harriet. He did not abandon the women of his life. He was not like his father, Joe, who had abandoned two entire families. John McCormack would not be apart from his Harriet on any day of their lives together. On his last day as Speaker, observers noted that the House galleries were filled not with the usual congressional staffers and Capitol Hill reporters but with the wives of the members themselves, who were there to honor the House's greatest husband.⁴⁵

Did McCormack atone for his sins of dishonoring the dead? Whether he did so to his own satisfaction remained locked within his heart, but there is little question that he certainly made the effort.

Complementary Identities

To his South Boston and Dorchester constituents, John McCormack was Irish, but not as Irish as many might have liked him to be. McCormack's efforts in the 1930s to fight anti-Semitism and his postwar support of the new state of Israel led some of the more hard-core Boston Irishmen to label him Rabbi John. These were most likely the remnants of Father Charles Edwin Coughlin's Social Justice movement, which thrived for a short time among Boston's poorest and least enlightened Irish Catholic residents. Later some of them would rally to the cause of Father Leonard Feeney, whose anti-Jewish and anti-Protestant diatribes regularly filled Boston Common with followers and detractors.

To such South Boston natives as historian Thomas O'Connor, John McCormack "looked like a herrin'" — a Maritimer.⁴⁶ Tall and gaunt, he dressed like an undertaker with his dark suits and white shirts. Never during his speakership, and not even during his retirement, did McCormack relinquish the formality of his dress.

The *Irish Echo*'s anniversary article on McCormack's death contrasted him with some other giants of the Boston Irish. "John McCormack isn't as colorful a celt as was Richard Cardinal Cushing. Nor does he have the shamrock style of the legendary James Michael Curley or the celtic charisma of our much loved and missed President John Fitzgerald Kennedy."⁴⁷ Given the Scottishness of his roots, McCormack would have been hard pressed to generate a shamrock style, never mind colorfulness and charisma. Such traits are seldom associated with the Scots.

It was John's brother, Edward J. McCormack, Sr., "Knocko," who was perceived as the real thing in South Boston. Knocko's loud, boisterous, and raucous ways were the stuff of local legend. Knocko, who stood a little under six foot but weighed close to three hundred pounds, was a human locomotive whose quick temper and powerful fists had earned him his nickname. He was a bootlegger during Prohibition and a tavern keeper afterward. Knocko was for many years the grand marshal of the annual Saint Patrick's Day parade in South Boston, which is akin to being declared

emperor. Knocko was a quintessential Irish “boyo.” In the words of former Massachusetts Senate president William M. Bulger, Knocko was “as self-effacing as a bass drum.”⁴⁸

Knocko generally referred to his brother as the Congy. To those like Bill Bulger and Tip O’Neill, who knew them both, John was Knocko’s complete opposite. But Knocko provided John with the Irish ethnic cover he needed to maintain the support of his South Boston and Dorchester constituents.

Knocko McCormack was a clear embodiment of Carl Wittke’s characterization of the Irish as a “warm-blooded and warm-hearted people . . . convivial and generous, sometimes to a fault, frequently improvident, [who] do not often come in conflict with the law except for intemperance, minor offenses, and occasional difficulties arising from the political graft of some of our larger cities.”⁴⁹

This characterization does not fit John McCormack, who was better described in this depiction of Wittke regarding the Scotch-Irish: “The Scotch-Irishman’s tenacity, firmness, and determination, his courage and his self-reliance, have helped him to make a notable record in political leadership.”⁵⁰ Wit, humor, and charm seem to be absent here. His protégé Tip O’Neill repeated the line “John McCormack was so conservative that he didn’t burn the candle at one end.”⁵¹

McCormack told me in 1977 what he learned early, that in the House, “it was the southerners who had the power and you had to be friendly with the southerners if you wanted to succeed.”⁵² But among the southerners, there was an important regional element in his choice of best friends and political allies. Those with whom he was closest were from eastern Tennessee and eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, north Georgia, and north Alabama. These locales, situated in the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains, were in the regional heart of the Scotch-Irish. Those curious hyphenated souls were the descendants of predominantly Presbyterian Scottish Lowlanders who first relocated to the Ulster Plantation in northern Ireland and then moved westward across the Atlantic. They preceded by a century the arrival of the Catholic Irish on this continent.⁵³

The southern Appalachian congressmen, both those born in and those representing that part of the nation, included a number of McCormack’s closest friends — Fred Vinson of Kentucky, Jere Cooper of Tennessee, Gene Cox of Georgia, Will Bankhead of north Alabama, and Alfred Bulwinkle of western North Carolina. Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas was McCormack’s greatest partner in shaping the legislative destiny of the House, and like McCormack, he shared his ethnic origins. Rayburn’s ancestors had originally come to Pennsylvania from the Ulster Plantation in northern Ireland during the 1700s migration of the Scotch-Irish to America.⁵⁴ Moving first to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, the Rayburn family continued westward into east Tennessee. Sam Rayburn was born there in Roane County, then a stronghold of the American Scotch-Irish in the southern Appalachian chain.

There was something about John McCormack that Rayburn and his fellow Scotch-Irishmen liked. Perhaps it was his Scotch-Irish tenacity, firmness, and determination. But McCormack could not tell them what it was they liked, for if it had been learned in South Boston that John McCormack was more Scotch-Irish and Canadian than immigrant Irish, his career in the House would have come to an abrupt and painful end.

Consequently, McCormack concealed his true ethnic identity. His reinvented Irish identity helped him hold his South Boston seat, and his genuine Scotch-Irish behavioral style gained him friends and legislative allies in a chamber dominated by these men of the mountains of the Southeast. Both of McCormack’s identities paid political divi-

dends.

In his fifth term, Congressman John McCormack served as a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee when it wrote the Social Security Act of 1935. This extraordinary bill instituted a national system of social insurance, including old age pensions. It established a cooperative federal-state system of unemployment compensation and a tax for old-age and survivors' insurance to be levied on employers and employees. It authorized grants to the states to help them meet the cost of old-age pensions allowed under state law and authorized grants to the states to assist in relief of the destitute, blind, homeless, dependent and delinquent children, and in services such as public health, vocational rehabilitation, and maternity and infant care.⁵⁵

Three decades later, as the Speaker of the 89th Congress (1965–1967), John McCormack presided over the House when Social Security legislation was greatly augmented by President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society acts creating Medicare and Medicaid, which changed dramatically the relation between the economic needs of Americans and the willingness of their government to address those needs. Once again, Boston's McCormack would play a key role in this transforming legislative era.

Never again would the full weight of poverty grind American citizens down while the federal government in Washington remained indifferent to their demands. Had this legislation existed a generation earlier, the McCormack children would not have suffered their afflictions nor been sped to their graves. Never again would an adult child have to deal agonizingly with the economic plight of an indigent parent as McCormack was forced to do with his father on one very painful Boston morning.

The legislation that John McCormack expedited through the Congress altered American social policy forever, and if it took a counterfeit personal history to place him in a post where he could make it happen, a far greater good had been done. Mary Ellen McCormack's "good boy" gave her, and all heroic mothers like her, a living monument. And that is no blarney! ❀

Notes

1. Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963–1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), photo pages, 224 ff.
2. Birch Bayh, *One Heartbeat Away: Presidential Disability and Succession* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1968).
3. The most critical accounts of the McCormack speakership appeared in two books by Democratic Congressman Richard Walker Bolling of Missouri, *House Out of Order* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1965), and *Power in the House: A History of the Leadership of the House of Representatives* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 230–238. Bolling, a protégé of Sam Rayburn, felt that McCormack had surrendered power to the conservative committee chairs.
4. Telephone interview with Dr. Martin Sweig, Winthrop, Massachusetts, June 1998.
5. Biographies and memoirs of the Austin-Boston Speakers: re Sam Rayburn, see C. Dwight Dorrough, *Mr. Sam* (New York: Random House, 1962); Edward Allen, *Sam Rayburn: Leading the Lawmakers* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Press, 1963); Booth Mooney, *Roosevelt and Rayburn: A Political Partnership* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971); Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975); Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984); D. B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987); re Joseph William Martin, see his autobiography, *My First Fifty Years in Politics*, as told to Robert J. Donovan (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960); re Carl

Albert, see his autobiography with Danney Goble, *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); re Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., see Paul Clancy and Shirley Elder, *Tip: A Biography of Thomas P. O'Neill, Speaker of the House* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); his best-selling memoir with William Novak, *Man of the House: The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O'Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987); and with Gary Hymel, *All Politics Is Local and Other Rules of the Game* (New York: Times Books, 1994); re Jim Wright, see John Barry, *The Ambition and the Power: The Fall of Jim Wright* (New York: Viking, 1989), and his own memoirs, *Worth It All: My War for Peace* (New York: Brassey's, 1993), and *Balance of Power: Presidents and Congress from the Era of McCarthy to the Age of Gingrich* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996).

6. A typical article about John McCormack in the Horatio Alger genre is Richard W. O'Connor, "From Andrew Square to the Speaker's Chair," *Yankee Magazine*, April 1976. McCormack loved the Horatio Alger stories and his nickname in South Boston was "Little Dick" because he regularly reread such Alger classics as *Ragged Dick*. His one-time residence at 470 Dorchester Street met Alger Street at the curb, which was named for Boston's own Horatio Alger.
7. Interview with Speaker John W. McCormack, Washington, D.C., September, 1968.
8. Among the relevant accounts are Sander Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924–1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974); Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); and Earl Latham, *The Communist Conspiracy in Washington from the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).
9. Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 212.
10. The Alien Registration Act was approved on June 28, 1940 (54 U.S. Statutes 670–676). McCormack's role was described in my May 1997 interview, Winchester, Massachusetts, with Dr. Martin Sweig.
11. Telephone interview with former Speaker John W. McCormack, Boston, March 1977.
12. Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., a future secretary of state, describes McCormack's role in *Lend-Lease, Weapon for Victory* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 68, 70. McCormack's Irish-American connection is made in Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans, and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), 216–217. McCormack's role in deflecting Irish-American opposition to legislation aiding Britain may be found in T. Ryle Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the USA: 1939–1947* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977). According to Ryle, page 39,

A representative from Missouri expressed surprise that McCormack should support the bill. "I never knew I would live to see the day that a good Irishman like John McCormack from Massachusetts would openly admit that Great Britain is our first line of defense."

McCormack responded [the] next day, thanking the Congressman for paying him a great compliment by characterising him as an Irishman. "There is," McCormack added, "one greater compliment that he could give me — by characterising me as 'The American of Irish descent from Boston!'"

13. See Martin, *My First Fifty Years in Politics*, 100–101, and Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), 614.
14. Robert H. Ferrell, *Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994). McCormack is not mentioned in this volume, even though he chaired the Resolutions Committee, which wrote the platform. See "McCormack Asks Collaboration," *New York Times*, July 10, 1944, 16; James A. Hagerty, "Wallace Backers in Chicago Gloomy . . . Brief Platform Sought — McCormack and Mrs. Norton Put It at 500 to 1,000 Words — Foreign Policy Stressed," *New York Times*, July 15, 1944, 26; and "Foreign-Policy Day Set by Democrats — McCormack Says the Platform Makers Will Devote All of Wednesday to This Issue," *New York Times*, July 17, 1944, 8.
15. Robert Donovan's version of that fateful afternoon has only Lewis Deschler, the House parliamentarian, and James M. Barnes, a White House legislative liaison, in the room with Truman and Rayburn. Others were expected at the close of House business. See

- Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 3–5. See also President Truman's own recollection in Volume I of his memoirs, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 4, and David M. McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 4, 7, for the swearing-in.
16. James Michael Curley noted John Kennedy as "the glaring exception," in his autobiography, *I'd Do It Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 333–334. Jack Beatty, in *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley, 1884–1958* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 480, contends that the decision not to sign the petition was JFK's own and countered his father's wishes. JFK wished to avenge Curley's attacks on his mother's father, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald. President Truman gave John McCormack the credit for the Curley pardon. The president said, "I did it for you, John," 481.
 17. Joe Kennedy's anti-Semitism was long suspected. See "The Jewish Question," in Ronald Kessler, *The Sins of the Father: Joseph P. Kennedy and the Dynasty He Founded* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 161–176. It is also noted in Nigel Hamilton's highly critical *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992), 108, 247, 512, 669. John McCormack's assistance to John Kennedy with Jewish voters is recounted in McCormack's interview with T. Harrison Baker of the University of Texas Oral History Project, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, September 23, 1968, 21–22.
 18. The House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration was created on March 5, 1958, by H.Res. 496 of the 85th Congress, with House Majority Leader John W. McCormack as chair.
 19. Given the fact that this selection led to two important presidencies, this decision has been analyzed countless times. The narrow success of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket has led many to take credit for putting it together. Even though Kennedy named him as his convention floor manager, McCormack is most often left out of accounts that focus on decision making within the Kennedy camp. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 50–57; Jules Witcover, *Crapshoot: Rolling the Dice on the Vice Presidency* (New York: Crown, 1992), 140–163; and Jeff Shesol, "The Affront," in *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 41–60. McCormack's role, if acknowledged, was presumably to convince his good friend Sam Rayburn, Johnson's floor manager, that Kennedy was offering the vice presidency to Lyndon Johnson in good faith, not as an empty gesture with the assumption that the offer would be rejected. See McCormack's interview with Baker, 13–17. See also Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 574–582.
 20. See McCormack interview with Baker, 24–25.
 21. The fullest account of this conflict appears in Murray B. Levin, *Kennedy Campaigning: The System and the Style as Practiced by Senator Edward Kennedy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). The Teddy-Eddie debates and their aftermath are covered in chap. 4, 181–232.
 22. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1964* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), covered the convention in chap. 9, "Lyndon Johnson's Convention," 243–293.
 23. See *Congressional Quarterly*, "Congress, 1965 — The Year In Review: Johnson Leadership, Large Majorities Win Legislative Grand Slam for Democrats," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1965, XXI (Washington, D.C., 1966), 65–79, and "Congress Backs Johnson on 93% of Roll Call Votes," 1099–1110. The success rate for Johnson in the House was 94 percent (105 successes on 112 votes).
 24. Accounts of this event may be found in P. Allan Dionisopoulos, *Rebellion, Racism and Representation* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970), 1–18, and Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 445–478.
 25. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1969, XXV (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), 25.

26. This argument gets fuller treatment in Garrison Nelson, "Congressional Race Politics and the End of the Austin-Boston Connection," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association in Portland, Maine, April 1990.
27. May 1997 telephone interview with Sweig.
28. See Richard C. Bain and Judith H. Parris, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1973), 20–23.
29. All the biographical accounts of John McCormack's early life contain this version. See "John William McCormack," in *The Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives: A Bibliography*, ed. Donald R. Kennon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 266; Charles Moritz, ed., "John W. McCormack," *Current Biography*, 1962 (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1963), 275–277; Richard H. Gentile, "John William McCormack," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement Ten, 1975–1980 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 483–487. Mea culpa! Even I accepted the story in my profile of John McCormack in *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, edited by Donald C. Bacon, Roger H. Davidson, and Morton H. Keller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), vol. 3, 1328–1330.
30. Transcribed interview with John W. McCormack conducted by Edward Kraft, May 18, 1971. The family history quotation appears on pages 2–3. These papers, hereinafter referred to as McCormack Family Papers, were provided to me by the Speaker's late nephew, the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Jr., in March 1997. A more public recounting of the tale appears in a reminiscing article, John McCormack, "I Remember When I Was Thirteen," in Leo P. Danwer, *I Remember Southie* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1976), 119–121. This short article was located by Paul Wright of the University of Massachusetts Boston.
31. The indispensable book on Boston Irish politics is Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).
32. Books about Curley include Beatty, *The Rascal King*; Joseph Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James M. Curley of Boston* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949); and Curley's autobiography, *I'd Do It Again*. Curley's best-known appearance is as the model for Mayor Frank Skeffington in Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1956). Books about John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald include John Henry Cutler, *"Honey Fitz": Three Steps to the White House* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962); and Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). Books about Martin Lomasney include Leslie G. Ainley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Brice Humphries, 1949), and a fictionalized account in Joseph Dinneen's 1938 novel, *Ward Eight* (New York: Arno Press reprint, 1976).
33. The full quotation is "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and byword through the world." John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," a sermon delivered on board the *Arbella*, 1630, in Emily Morison Beck, ed., *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 15th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 264.
34. Henry David Thoreau, *The Variorum Walden*, annotated by Walter Harding (New York: Twayne, 1962), 173. I thank Andrew McLean for bringing this quotation to my attention.
35. *Ibid.*, 174. The "brat" quote appears on page 173. Later efforts to explain Thoreau's anti-Irish prejudice were undertaken in Frank Buckley, "Thoreau and the Irish," *New England Quarterly* 13 (1940): 389–400.
36. This version of the refrain was provided to me by three Maritime-descended Bostonians. The implication was that Maritimers would chase herring in their small boats, pull them in with their bare hands, and choke them.
37. Lomasney's entry: "5th Suffolk, Boston, born there of Irish parents, Dec. 3, 1859," *A Souvenir of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention; Boston, 1917–18–19* (Stoughton, Mass.: A. M. Bridgman, 1919), 78. At the convention Lomasney served on the Bill of Rights committee while twenty-six-year-old John McCormack served on the Form and Phraseology committee, 81.
38. According to Leslie Ainley, Lomasney's biographer, "It was a favorite trick of some of his

political antagonists to charge to the Irish electorate that Lomasney was a 'Nowey,' a native of Nova Scotia. In those days of strong racial feelings, this was calculated to be injurious to one seeking Irish support," *Boston Mahatma*, 20. Martin had "documentary evidence" to refute these charges. His parents' marriage license, his own birth certificate and baptismal record "were records that the scandalmongers who voiced the 'Nowey' charge could not overcome," *Boston Mahatma*, 21.

39. Tulane University political scientist Harold Zink states that "Mr. Lomasney claims Boston as [his] native city in spite of persistent rumors to the effect that Nova Scotia deserves that honor. The doubt as to his birthplace arises from the absence of record in parish or public archives of Boston. However, Mr. Lomasney has never taken out naturalization papers, has repeatedly insisted that he was born in Boston down on South Margin Street, and states that he has a birth certificate and a baptismal record bearing out his claim." "Czar" Martin Lomasney," in *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), 69.
40. Correspondence from a Prince Edward Island individual familiar with the McCormack family history in Canada, May 28, 1998. A century later, this is still a sore point in Souris.
41. Letter from Charlotte Walsh Hannaway, Plymouth, Massachusetts, to Edward J. McCormack, postmarked February 23, 1982, in the McCormack Family Papers.
42. Death certificate of Joseph McCormick (*sic*), Knox County, Maine, received February 7, 1929, and burial certificate, Town of Waldoboro, Lincoln County, Maine dated February 9, 1929.
43. *Lincoln County News* accounts: February 7, 1929, "Joseph McCormack was taken to Knox hospital for treatment Tuesday," 7; February 14, 1929, "Joseph E. McCormack passed away, Wednesday, Feb. 8, at Knox hospital, Rockland, of pneumonia. He was born at Prince Edward Island 66 years ago. He was a paving cutter by trade and came to this place at the beginning of the stone-cutting industry 25 years ago, making his home with Mr. and Mrs. George W. Noyes. He is survived by one brother. Funeral services were held from Flanders' funeral parlors Saturday afternoon with the Rev. H. O. Magert, pastor of the Methodist Church officiating. Burial was in rural cemetery," 7. I thank Ms. Libby Lorusso for tracking this down.
44. Letter from Speaker John W. McCormack to Harriet McCormack, June 1968, in the McCormack Family Papers.
45. Telephone interview with William McSweeney, Washington, D.C., October 1996. McSweeney and his wife, Dorothy, were regular dinner guests of the Speaker and Mrs. McCormack in the 1960s. McSweeney, an executive at Occidental Petroleum, worked with the Speaker in 1970, his last full year in office after the departure of his scandal-ridden associates, Dr. Martin Swaig and Nathan Veloshen. Dorothy McSweeney worked on oral histories with the Speaker.
46. Telephone interview with Thomas H. O'Connor, July 1998.
47. Maureen Connell, "Remembrances of those who died on November 22, especially John W. McCormack," *Boston Irish Echo*, November 21, 1981, 10.
48. William M. Bulger, *While the Music Lasts: My Life in Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 14-16. The quotation appears on page 14. See also Tip O'Neill's depiction of Knocko in *Man of the House*, 121-122.
49. Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America: The Saga of the Immigrant* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), 173. The book was originally published in 1939.
50. *Ibid.*, 63.
51. O'Neill with Novak, *Man of the House*, 121, and Wittke, *We Who Built America*, 178.
52. Telephone interview with former Speaker John McCormack, March 1977. William V. Shannon makes just this point about McCormack's House career in *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 341-342. Shannon also indicated that McCormack, who spent most of his weekends in Washington, seldom returned to Boston.
53. Books about the Scotch-Irish in America include Henry James Ford, *The Scotch-Irish in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), republished in 1966 by Anchor Books, Hampden, Connecticut; James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*

- (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); and Carlton Jackson, *A Social History of the Scotch-Irish* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1993).
54. Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 12. A wonderful account of the Scotch-Irish migration and its impact on America may be found in "Borderlands to the Backcountry: The Flight from North Britain, 1717–1775," in David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 605–782.
55. On the 1935 act, see "The Social Security Act, 1935," in Bernard B. Schwartz and Robert B. Stevens, eds., *Income Security*, vol. 3 of *Statutory History of the United States* (New York: Chelsea House, 1970), 59–167. McCormack is mentioned primarily for his role in passing the Social Security Amendments of 1939, 235–236.