

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*Minnesota Politics  
and Irish Identity:  
Five Sons of Erin  
at the State Capitol*  
*John W. Milton*

**Spring 2009**

Volume 44, Number 1

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*Five Sons of Erin at the Minnesota State Capitol (clockwise from the upper right): Senator Nicholas D. Coleman (bronze bust by Paul T. Granlund, 1983; photo by Robert W. Larson, 2009); Ignatius Donnelly, 1891 (oil portrait by Nicholas Richard Brewer; courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society); Archbishop John Ireland, about 1910 (pastel portrait by an anonymous artist; courtesy of the*

*Minnesota Historical Society); Governor Andrew Ryan McGill, 1889 (oil portrait by Carl Gutherz; courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society); and General James Shields, about 1860 (oil portrait by Henry W. Carling; courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society). In the background is a postcard of the Minnesota State Capitol from about 1907 (postcard courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society).*

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*Ramsey County History* is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2009, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 44, Number 1

Spring 2009

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The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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*Harlan Stoehr and Helen Hammersten*

*Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

This spring, we invite you to take an armchair walk with us to some familiar sites with a new perspective. John Milton illuminates the diversity of Irish heritage in St. Paul by depicting the stories of five prominent Ramsey County men who have been honored within the halls of the Minnesota Capitol. Among them is former Senate Majority Leader Nick Coleman, whose son, Chris Coleman, serves as St. Paul's current mayor. Another of Milton's subjects, Ignatius Donnelly, is famous for dreaming up a failed city, Nininger, in the 1850s, and later helping to establish the national People's Party. In the second article, Greg Brick, a local geological expert who obtained permission to view Carver's Cave, gives us the real "inside story" of the cave, including historic and current maps and photographs. And the third article draws on Ramsey County's heritage as an agricultural community, which we honor at our own Gibbs Museum in Falcon Heights. Harlan Stoehr and Helen Hammersten tell the wonderful story of Clara Oberg, a strong woman who developed the Ramsey County 4-H program into a vital community resource from 1928 to 1953. Thanks to Oberg's vigorous leadership, the 4-H sponsored such various programs as Victory Gardens, athletic teams, and even community orchestras!

*Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board*

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# *Minnesota Politics and Irish Identity:* Five Sons of Erin at the State Capitol

*John W. Milton*

A tour of Minnesota's Capitol often begins south of the building, in the main driveway that is perched like a riverboat landing above the Mall and St. Paul's downtown.

From the driveway, most visitors climb the forty broad steps cut from grey Minnesota granite, and enter the Capitol's vestibule through one of the tall, windowed brass doors. Tours begin where the vestibule opens up into the central rotunda, a crossroads for the steady stream of players and spectators in the complex game of government, especially when the Legislature is in session. Minnesota's Capitol, designed by local architect Cass Gilbert in the popular beaux-arts classic style of his time, evokes the sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance, and, on high, the dome of Michelangelo at St. Peter's in Rome. It rivals, even as it takes inspiration from, the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

Throughout the building are paintings and sculpture that reflect the ethnic origins of the major nationalities that settled the state: British, German, Scandinavian, French, and Irish. On the walls of the corridors on the first and ground floors are portraits of all thirty-seven governors elected since statehood in 1858, and eleven large paintings that depict the early history of the state and the prominent role of Minnesotans in major battles of the American Civil War. The Capitol's alcoves are occupied by seventeen sculptured busts and statues of political luminaries, war heroes, and other icons of the state's history.

Cass Gilbert's masterpiece, completed in 1905, was the third capitol built since statehood, all of them in a city that is renowned for its cultural and religious origins in Ireland. As described by Minnesota historian Mary Lethert Wingerd in *Claiming the City*, an exemplary analysis of "the power of place," St. Paul's Irish were outnumbered by German and Scandinavian immigrants in the late nineteenth century. Yet "a small cohort carved a niche of power and influence that, in time, against all odds, turned Irish identity itself into a capital asset and

influenced the city so deeply that St. Paul came to be known as an 'Irish town.'"<sup>1</sup> Wingerd documents how "a combination of social, political, and economic positioning gave a particular currency to Irish, Catholic, and Democratic affiliations in St. Paul that disappeared when one crossed the river to Minneapolis." In the realm of industry and commerce, the city's Irish were favored by empire builder James J. Hill, whose own roots were in Northern Ireland, and who married the Irish-Catholic Mary Mehegan. And, according to Wingerd, the city's "politics and patronage served up abundant benefits for the Irish . . . they were consistently over represented in civil service jobs, and the most typical avenue for Irish advancement was through politics and the law." That said, the politics of the capital city "differed from classic Irish political machines in that while the Irish were highly visible as party brokers, they were not the dominant voting constituency. Opponents decried 'Irish control' of St. Paul politics, but in fact the city's politics played a delicate balancing game."<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, then, of the many prominent Minnesotans who've been honored at the Capitol—in paintings, clay, and bronze—only five have any Irish roots.

Just five, and if visitors to the Capitol were to blink as they passed them by, they'd more likely recall an ethnic mix that is distinctly British, Germanic, and Scandinavian. Surely, not Irish.

One might wonder: why so few in the middle of this "Irish town" that, during its 151 years as Minnesota's capital city, remains one of the three or four principal centers of Irish heritage, culture, and political clout in the entire USA? Is it simply that the Irish influence, so imbedded in St. Paul, the seat of government and Minnesota's second largest in population, does in fact vanish at the bridges that cross westward over the Mississippi?

Who are these five sons of Erin, surrounded by rank after rank of Anglos, Germans, Swedes, and Norwegians? Since there are so few, with such diverse life stories, it seems likely they were honored for their accomplishments rather than for their ethnicity.

## **The Senator:**

### **Nicholas David Coleman (1925–1981)**

Born and bred in St. Paul, Nick Coleman is honored for his service to Minnesota by a bronze bust placed at the bottom of the grand staircase that leads up to the Senate Chamber, where he became the first Democrat in 114 years to be elected Majority Leader.<sup>3</sup> Coleman, marked as a "comer" from his first session in 1963, served in the Senate for eighteen years. His cadre of progressive first-termers also included Wendell Anderson and Rudy Perpich. Both Anderson and Perpich later became governor, an office that was denied to Coleman. His campaign for the Democratic Farmer Labor endorsement in 1970 fell short, and a brief try at the U.S. Senate seat in 1978 also failed. Yet for nearly a decade Coleman was a principal conductor (and often the soloist) in

orchestrating the most extensive transformation of Minnesota's legislative branch, elevating it to coequal status with the executive. With leadership from Coleman and House Speaker Martin Sabo, Minnesota was on the cutting edge of this reformation that swept countrywide from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. And with Nick Coleman's persistent leadership, the Legislature established a wide-ranging record of getting things done for people, especially those less advantaged.<sup>4</sup>

In his last years, Coleman's lifestyle changed. He enjoyed wine with meals, European-style, and learned to cook. He discovered such things as rugs from what was then called "The Orient." To the surprise of most friends and colleagues, the urbane Nick Coleman became an ardent hiker, canoer, camper and backpacker, mostly on trips to the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota and the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. At the close of the legislative session, he'd have everything packed and waiting so he'd waste no time heading out for the wilderness lakes and trails. "Nick didn't develop interests; he developed passions," says his second wife, Deborah Howell, a journalist now living in Washington, D.C. "Wine, Oriental rugs, food, camping and backpacking, all that was an important part of his life."<sup>5</sup> Clearly, he was looking forward to a life away from the political arena.

On March 5, 1981—two months after retiring from the Senate—Nick Coleman died of a rare form of acute myeloid leukemia. Following a funeral Mass at the Cathedral of St. Paul, he was buried in the Fort Snelling National Cemetery. A surge of gratitude by colleagues and friends resulted in a bust being commissioned, and the work by Paul T. Granlund was unveiled in a public ceremony on April 27, 1983—remarkably soon after his passing. At the ceremony, Secretary of the Senate Patrick Flahaven, who served for thirty-six years in that position and retired this January, wanted to provide special seating to those active senators who had served with Coleman. Flahaven was surprised to learn that just two years and three months after Coleman's last term ended, only twenty-four out of the sixty-seven senators had ever served with him. One alone remained from the sena-



*From his desk in the back of the Senate chamber, Nick Coleman, the former Navy signalman, could survey activities on the floor and keep track of his DFL members. When he rose to speak, as seen in this photo from about 1975, he would tower over his seated colleagues, physically and oratorically. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

tors elected in the 1960s. "Before our time," says Flahaven, "there was much less turnover, and it seemed that senators stayed on for years and years."<sup>6</sup>

Twenty-eight years have passed since the death of Nick Coleman. For many years thereafter, flowers were sent on Christmas and St. Patrick's Day by his late sister, Rosemary Coleman, for placement around Coleman's bust. Howell continues to do the same in remembrance of his birthday, their wedding day, and the day he died.

### **The Populist: Ignatius Donnelly (1831–1901)**

Donnelly was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, moving to Minnesota in 1856. He settled southeast of St. Paul in Nininger City, a place named for his real estate partner, who shared Donnelly's dreams of building a prosperous community there. The project was a colossal failure. When the boomlet ran its course, the Donnelly home became the only remaining residence in Nininger. Empty for many years and fallen into disrepair, the house finally was razed in 1949.

Donnelly also plunged into Dakota County politics and ran as a Republican for the Territorial Legislature in 1857. He lost, but tried again the following year when Minnesota attained statehood. Running this time as a candidate for the State Senate, he lost again. In 1859, at last, he was elected lieutenant governor, and served two terms before winning one of the state's first seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served three terms.<sup>7</sup>

After his defeat for reelection in 1868, he returned to the state political arena and won two terms in the State Senate and two in the House as an Independent and candidate of the People's Party. In 1884, between terms in the Legislature, he ran for Congress as a Democrat, and lost. Donnelly was a major force in the organization of various progressive groups under the banner of the national People's Party in 1892, but after a few short years as a third party, most of its platform was rejected or co-opted by Democrats such as William Jennings Bryan, and even by some Republicans. In his last campaign for public office in 1900, he was the candidate of the People's Party for vice president, another losing effort. He died a year later.<sup>8</sup> Donnelly is buried in Calvary, the oldest Catholic cemetery in St. Paul.

Blessed, and perhaps also cursed, with indefatigable energy, Donnelly was a successful lecturer on a variety of topics and author of nine books, ranging from fiction to fantasy to popular science. His best known work was *Caesar's Column* (1891), but the most controversial was *The Great Cryptogram* (1888), an effort to prove that the English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon was the true author of William Shakespeare's plays.

In 1981, eighty years after his death, a bronze bust was made to celebrate the sesquicentennial of Donnelly's birth, from an original plaster casting done in 1901 by sculptor John Karl Daniels, and was placed on the first floor of the north corridor.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Archbishop: John Ireland (1838–1918)**

Ireland arrived in St. Paul with his family in 1852, having emigrated from County Kilkenny. After being chosen by Bishop Joseph Cretin to study at a seminary in Meximieux, France, he completed his

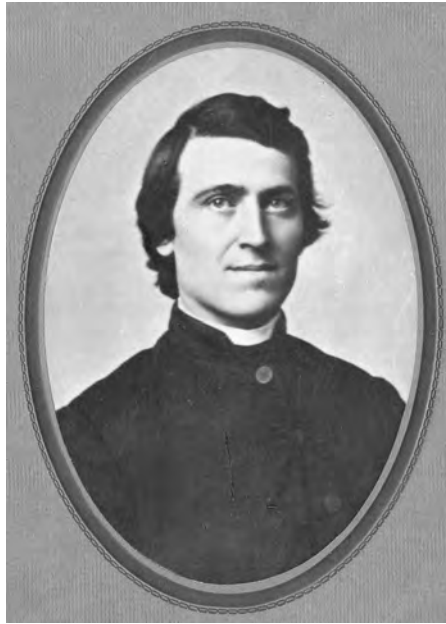


preparation for the priesthood and returned to be ordained, in 1861.<sup>10</sup> It was just in time to serve as chaplain of the Fifth Minnesota Regiment in the Civil War. After his service, he rose through the church hierarchy and became the first Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In a region where Catholicism spread with the arrival of hordes of German and Irish immigrants, John Ireland used his position to promote several causes: colonization of Minnesota's countryside by Irish families from the East Coast and the mother country; education from early childhood to college; and—in what served as a prelude to legislation by Minnesota Congressman Andrew Volstead to enact Prohibition—a crusade for total abstinence.<sup>11</sup>

Ireland's energetic campaign to establish Irish colonies in the area southwest of the Twin Cities was resisted by powerful leaders in the church, notably Archbishop John Hughes of New York. Yet he moved ahead, creating thirteen colonies in the 1870s, all offering Mass by priests recruited and placed by Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Having their own mostly Irish priests, he thought, would allay fears of being “beyond the reach of church and priest.” Among these settlements were Derrynane Township, Erin Township, Kilkenny Township (after his home county), Avoca (named by Ireland from a river in County Wicklow), and Clontarf Township.

John Ireland didn't take the smooth pathway, in fact his strong advocacy of an American Catholic church—versus one divided along ethnic lines—led to criticism that he was not sufficiently Catholic, especially from French and German church leaders. In this, however, Ireland enjoyed the support of Pope Leo XIII.<sup>13</sup> In addition, he was an outspoken champion of racial equality, a stand that made him unpopular with other church leaders. He preached full civil rights for African Americans, though he did not include full equality for either women, or for American Indians, whom he considered wards of the government.

On matters of public policy, Ireland's flexible interpretation of the separation of church and state allowed him to combine forces with politicians of all party affiliations, though he was more sympathetic to Republicans. When aligned with James J.



*The young priest, Fr. John Ireland, as chaplain to the Fifth Minnesota Regiment in the Civil War. He gave last rites to dying Minnesotans during the Mississippi Valley campaign (1862). A. Larson photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

Hill, a Bourbon Democrat, Ireland's influence was pretty well unstoppable. He died in 1918, leaving a stunning legacy: the Cathedral of St. Paul and the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis; St. Paul Seminary; most of the Twin Cities' parochial grade schools and high schools; Catholic churches dotting the landscape southwest and west of the Twin Cities; the colleges of St. Catherine and St. Thomas, as well as the first electric streetcar on Grand Avenue connecting downtown and the Cathedral with the College of St. Thomas.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps most of all, in his long tenure as a prime mover in St. Paul, he was both spiritual leader and inspiration for the city's Irish, many of whom arrived penniless from their native land, and who had gained, at the time of his death, a dominant presence in the culture, economy, and politics of St. Paul. Ireland's funeral was concelebrated by eight archbishops, thirty bishops, twelve monsignors, seven hundred priests, and two hundred seminarians.<sup>15</sup> He is buried in St. Paul's Calvary Cemetery, established by his mentor, Bishop Cretin.

John Ireland's most evident legacies are the Cathedral, capstone of his leg-

endary career as priest and bishop; his sponsorship of settling thousands of Irish immigrants in villages and farming communities; and the broad boulevard bearing his name that connects the Capitol and the Cathedral.

Less well known is his place of honor within Minnesota's seat of government, placed there by no less than its architect, Cass Gilbert. In the reception area of the governor's office is an enormous painting by Edwin H. Blashfield, *The Fifth Minnesota at Corinth*, and seen in back of the Union line repulsing the Confederates is a pale, clean-shaven young man. It belongs to Father John Ireland, regimental chaplain to the Fifth Minnesotans, who went with the soldiers into that key battle at Corinth, Mississippi, in October 1862. Ireland not only provided for the warriors' spiritual needs; he reportedly distributed ammunition to them during the battle.<sup>16</sup> Cass Gilbert arranged for Blashfield to paint the scene and also to place it so that if the young priest's gaze could be imagined to look through the main reception room and out the south windows of the Capitol, he'd see the Cathedral. (Gilbert was notorious for paying attention to the tiniest detail, so it's unlikely that the future archbishop's place in Minnesota's house of government was left to chance.)

## **The Governor:**

### **Andrew Ryan McGill (1840–1905)**

Born and raised in Pennsylvania, the future governor was descended from an Irish immigrant who came from Antrim County in the late eighteenth century. McGill arrived in Minnesota to teach school just as the Civil War began. He enlisted in the Ninth Minnesota Volunteers and served for two years until discharged for a disability. He settled in Nicollet County, where he was superintendent of public schools and owner-editor of the *St. Peter Tribune*. After election to clerk of the county's district court, McGill studied law under Judge Horace Austin and was admitted to the bar. Austin was elected governor of Minnesota in 1870 and took McGill with him to the Capitol as his private secretary. In 1873, Austin appointed his former student to be the state's commissioner of insurance, where

he served for thirteen years. McGill won the Republican nomination for governor in 1886 and was elected to a two-year term. But in 1888, a schism in his party resulted in an unorthodox selection of the party's candidate for governor. Instead of supporting their incumbent reformer, party leaders dumped McGill for William R. Merriam, a St. Paul banker and speaker of the Minnesota House.

During his brief tenure, McGill was credited with revision of the transportation laws for agricultural products, simplification of the tax laws, abolition of contract prison labor, establishment of a soldiers' home, and creation of a bureau of labor statistics. Though unable to win a second term as governor, McGill remained active in politics. He lived in a Queen Anne-style home on a hill in the St. Anthony Park neighborhood of St. Paul that remains to this day. He continued to practice law, was elected to the State Senate, and in 1900 was appointed postmaster of St. Paul. McGill was serving in the State Senate when the new Capitol was opened.

Upon his death later in 1905, former Attorney General Henry W. Childs said: "Governor McGill represented the best ideals of civic life. He fulfilled, in a marked degree, the obligations of a citizen. In all his relations with his fellow men, whether in public or in private station, he was always the courteous gentleman and useful citizen."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, in view of his political defeat in 1888, not ruthless enough.

McGill is buried in Oakland, a non-denominational cemetery in St. Paul, where Governors Austin, Gorman, Marshall, Ramsey, and Sibley are also interred. Along with the other thirty-six governors of Minnesota since statehood, Andrew McGill's portrait, by Charles (Carl) Guthertz in 1889, hangs in the west wing of the Capitol, a few paces down the hall from the painting that includes Ireland and the bust of Nick Coleman, and around the corner from that of Ignatius Donnelly.<sup>18</sup>

## The General:

### James J. Shields (1810–1879)

Shields came over from Ireland's County Tyrone in 1826, aged sixteen, but did not arrive in Minnesota until 1855. During those three decades, he practiced law in

Illinois, served in that state's House, as a state Supreme Court Justice and State Auditor. In 1842, a dispute over letters to the editor of the *Springfield Journal* that were critical of Shields, written by Abraham Lincoln's fiancée Mary Todd, resulted in Shields' challenging Lincoln to a duel.<sup>19</sup> After Lincoln had selected the weapons (broadswords), they were both talked out of it and became friends. Four years later, Shields was chosen to be brigadier general of Illinois volunteers in the Mexican-American War under General Zachary Taylor. He was wounded twice, in the battles of Churubusco and Chapultepec. After that war, he was appointed by President James Polk and confirmed by the U.S. Senate to be governor of the Oregon Territory, but decided not to accept it. In 1848, he ran as a Democrat and was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois. He served one term and was defeated for re-election in 1854.<sup>20</sup>

Once he had moved to Minnesota, Shields purchased property in Faribault, selected parcels of land in what became the townships of Shieldsville and Erin, initially brought seven Irishmen from St. Paul to settle there, and promoted this area for settlement by families escaping the slums of the East Coast and the disastrous famine back in the homeland.<sup>21</sup> (Some of the first settlers were Irish immigrants who had served with him in the Mexican War.) By the following year, St. Patrick's Church was erected in Shieldsville for the nearly 500 Irish-born Catholics living there.<sup>22</sup>

When Minnesota became a state in 1858, the Legislature chose Henry Rice and Shields as the state's first U.S. Senators. Shields got the shorter term, which expired after one year, and when he ran for reelection, the Republicans had taken control of the Legislature and he was not reelected.

After retiring from the Senate, Shields moved to California; soon his life was interrupted by the Civil War. He offered his services to Lincoln, the old friend from Springfield who was now the sixteenth U.S. president, and was appointed brigadier general of volunteers. He was sent to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, the scene of much action in the war's first year. In March 1862, the rival armies were engaged near Winchester and in nearby

Kernstown, where Shields was wounded on the first day. Despite this, he directed the brigade from his cot. Shields' standing, Colonel Nathan Kimball, later reported that he'd "carried out his general's plans and followed his directions, until the field was won."<sup>23</sup> The Confederate leader who withdrew his troops was Major General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson and the defeat at Kernstown was recorded as the only one ever suffered by Jackson, Robert E. Lee's most successful general. As a result of his service in the Shenandoah, Lincoln promoted Shields to major general of volunteers, and it was rumored that he was offered command of the Army of the Potomac. Shields, according to his biographer Henry A. Castle, declined the offer and resigned, reportedly because of strained relations with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. He then returned to California, and moved again within two years to Missouri, where he was once again elected to the U.S. Senate, becoming the first (and probably last) person to serve in that body from three different states.

When Shields died, in 1879, he was living in the small town of Carrollton, Missouri; he is buried there, at St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery. A larger than life-sized statue of Major General Shields, by sculptor Frederick C. Hibbard, stands in the southeast corner of the Capitol rotunda, on the second floor. When it was unveiled, on October 20, 1914, Archbishop Ireland eulogized Shields with the hope that "coming generations may know him, and, knowing him, emulate in the service of humanity and of country his deeds of noble and disinterested patriotism and valor." Ireland also praised him for bringing so many of his fellow Irishmen to find "peace and prosperity" in Minnesota.<sup>24</sup>



## All Sons of Erin, But Diverse

Though these five Irishmen shared the country of their ancestors, an interest in politics, and a legacy of benefits to the people of Minnesota, they followed divergent pathways to be honored at Minnesota's Capitol.

### Lifespan

Their combined lifespan was 171 years,

from the birth of Shields to the death of Coleman, or from roughly half a century before Minnesota became a state to the celebration of its 125th birthday. Coleman was born in 1925 and was youngest when he died in 1981 at the age of 56. Donnelly was born in 1831 and lived 70 years. Ireland, born in 1838, lived the longest; he died in 1918, at age 80. McGill was born in 1840 and died in 1905 at 65. And Shields, born in 1810, lived to be 69.

### Generation

Ireland and Shields were born in Ireland and came over as teenagers. Donnelly was second-generation American, and McGill third-generation. Coleman was fourth-generation on his father's side, and second-generation on his mother's. All but Coleman were contemporaries, and to some extent knew each other in the 1850s through the 1870s. Despite the passage of years, Coleman learned from his mother about the famine and other factors in the great wave of emigration from Ireland, as well as about battles for Irish independence in the twentieth century. With encouragement from his mother and great-uncle, Father Nicholas J. Finn, Coleman travelled to his country of origin, particularly to the counties of Kerry and Cork, home of the Finns and Colemans.

### North and South

Coleman and Ireland were descendants from the southern Irish counties of Kerry, Cork, and Kilkenny that are in today's Republic of Ireland. The families of Donnelly and Shields were from County Tyrone, and the McGills were from Antrim, both belonging today to Northern Ireland, that area retained as a separate region within the United Kingdom after Ireland won its independence in 1922. Despite an uneasy and often contentious coexistence between northern and southern Irish, there is a common heritage, including the Gaelic language. Irish-Americans from both north and south share an ethnic identity, though the population in the south is predominantly Catholic and that of the north mostly Protestant. Shields, from Tyrone in the north, was an energetic force in setting up Irish colonies in rural Minnesota, collab-



*Where they came from . . .*  
**Nick Coleman, Cork and Kerry**  
**Ignatius Donnelly, Tyrone**  
**John Ireland, Kilkenny**  
**Andrew McGill, Antrim**  
**James Shields, Tyrone**

orating with Archbishop Ireland, a son of County Kilkenny in the south. Still, it's not uncommon, even in the twenty-first century, for descendants from the south of Ireland to slight those whose ancestors lived up north as "not truly Irish."

### Religion

Coleman was born and raised Catholic. Educated from first grade through college in Catholic schools, he married his first wife, also Irish Catholic, at St. Mary's of the Lake, in White Bear Lake, where his great-uncle was pastor. His six children were raised as Catholics, and though Coleman did not always adhere to the rules laid down by the church hierarchy in Rome, his funeral mass was celebrated at the Cathedral of St. Paul.

Donnelly was born Catholic, but along with his father he drifted from the church, restlessly seeking spiritual meaning in a variety of places. When he died on the first day of the twentieth century, Father Ambrose McNulty of St. Luke's Church in St. Paul came to the home of Donnelly's son and "conducted the religious service," though omitting the homily.<sup>25</sup> Donnelly is buried in Calvary, St. Paul's largest Catholic cemetery.

Archbishop Ireland, of course, lived his entire life within the Catholic Church. Had he not been so prominent, his younger sister Ellen might have been the family's claim to fame. While John Ireland was studying for the priesthood, Ellen "took the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and the name Sister Seraphine. There was never much doubt that she was cut from the cloth of leadership. For a period of thirty-nine years beginning in 1882, she served as Mother Superior of the sisters' St. Paul Province (Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota)."<sup>26</sup> During a lifetime of service, her order opened more than thirty schools and five hospitals, and she was the prime mover in founding the College of St. Catherine, the state's first college for women.

Andrew McGill's ancestors were Protestants from Northern Ireland and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; in the archive of the Minnesota Historical Society, he is listed as a member of the Methodist church.

Shields was born and remained a lifelong Catholic. The archbishop of St. Louis attended his funeral, and Shields is buried in the Catholic cemetery of St. Mary's Church.

### Political Party

Coleman was never anything but a Democrat (DFL Party in Minnesota). He would quip that until the age of majority he thought that IrishCatholicDemocrat was only one word. Donnelly ran under no less than four political banners: Republican, Independent, Democrat, and People's parties. Ireland was officially nonpartisan, a requirement of his job, but except when arm-in-arm with his close friend James J. Hill, he more often sided with Republican interests. McGill was always identified with the Republican Party, as governor and later as a state senator. Shields was a Democrat each time he held public office, and might have been less peripatetic if he hadn't been ousted by Republican majorities in the legislatures of Illinois and Minnesota.

### Elective Office

Coleman was elected to only one public office, state senator, and served continuously

for eighteen years. He lost the DFL endorsement for governor to Wendell Anderson in 1970, and bowed out of a brief run for the U.S. Senate in 1978. Donnelly, as is well known, ran for nearly every public office, from state representative to vice president. His longest tenure in office was three terms as a U.S. Congressman. Ireland was chosen for advancement to higher office within the Catholic Church, and that involved the complex politics of any bureaucracy, but in the end he needed to win only the support of an electorate of one, the Pope.



*Congressman Ignatius Donnelly, in this 1865 portrait by famed Civil War photographer Matthew B. Brady. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

McGill ran for one two-year term as governor, and was admired as a reformer. He was elected governor in 1886, and received congratulatory letters from notables such as Ignatius Donnelly and Archbishop John Ireland.<sup>27</sup> But in 1888, his party nominated someone else for governor. Ten years later, McGill was elected to the State Senate from St. Paul.

In this age of popular election of senators, the fact that the legislators of three different states would choose James Shields to represent them in the U.S. Senate is curious. In his first election to the Senate from Illinois, where he was well established, he served the full six-year term (1849–1855), and was a colleague of Stephen Douglas, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, John Calhoun, and Jefferson Davis.

His subsequent returns to the Senate were short-lived. In Minnesota, despite his having lived in the state for only four years, his military record in the Mexican War certainly enhanced his profile, as well as his having been a senator from Illinois. And in Missouri, where he was appointed to fill a vacancy in the Senate, he was known as a Civil War hero, wounded again, promoted by Lincoln to major general, with a reputation brightened by defeating Stonewall Jackson. In addition to being elected to the U.S. Senate from three states, Shields was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives in 1874 and served two terms, the only position that required him to win the popular vote.

### *Military Service*

All served in the military except for Donnelly, though he sought, unsuccessfully, an appointment to lead a Minnesota regiment at the outset of the Civil War.<sup>28</sup> Coleman enlisted in the U.S. Navy after graduation from Cretin High School in 1942, and was honorably discharged when the war ended.<sup>29</sup> The other three were veterans of the Civil War.

Young Father Ireland was ordained on December 22, 1861, three days after the Fifth Minnesota Regiment was organized. For most of its deployment, the Fifth was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lucius F. Hubbard, later a governor of Minnesota. Ireland's first assignment as a priest was offering spiritual counsel to the soldiers of his regiment in time of hardship and giving the last rites to those who were dying. Along with the men in blue uniforms, Ireland would grow up fast. The Fifth Minnesota came under fire for the first time against the Confederates in May 1862 in the Mississippi Valley campaign. Corinth, Mississippi, was a rail center that was essential to the Confederacy because it was where both the north-south and east-west railroads crossed. Control of Corinth would pave the way to the Union's eventual victory at Vicksburg, and that, along with Gettysburg, would be a major setback for the rebels.

Corinth fell to the Yankees on May 25 when Confederate General Pierre G.T. Beauregard, finding himself surrounded, pulled his troops out. The real trial by

fire was still to come. In early October, the Confederates launched a fierce attack to regain Corinth, and for two days the battle was joined. At last, the Fifth Minnesota was able to drive them back and save the town.<sup>30</sup> According to Ireland's biographer, Marvin O'Connell, if the break in the Union line had not been closed, "the Confederates could have seized the Federal entrenchments from the rear, and Corinth would be lost, if not (General William) Rosecrans' entire army."<sup>31</sup>

The remainder of Ireland's service to the Fifth Minnesota was, according to O'Connell, "something of an anticlimax," and he returned to Minnesota in the spring of 1863. But after Corinth, in which he gave comfort and last rites to countless fallen comrades, "he took pride, and understandably so, in having been tested in that uniquely masculine world, an army on campaign."<sup>32</sup> And James P. Shannon, writing for a Catholic history magazine, recalled that "despite the brevity of his Civil War career, Ireland savored all his life the taste of action he had had at the Battle of Corinth, and he always maintained close bonds with other veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic."<sup>33</sup>

McGill served with the Ninth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment for two years, and his unit was posted in St. Peter, Minnesota, to defend the territory against the Sioux Indians. He was discharged honorably for what was described as a serious disability incurred during his service.<sup>34</sup>

Shields seems to have been a natural warrior. According to his admiring biographer, Henry Castle, he was appointed by President James K. Polk to be brigadier general of volunteers shortly after the outbreak of the Mexican War. His first engagement was the successful siege of the port city of Vera Cruz, in March, 1847, where "General Shields distinguished himself, and gave good promise of other valiant service. This promise was amply fulfilled at the battle of Cerro Gordo and at the storming of Chapultepec. At the former battle his deeds of valor seem like those of Roland at Roncesvalles."<sup>35</sup> Castle describes how Shields was severely wounded at Cerro Gordo, "was carried from the battlefield apparently lifeless," and for his gallantry in action was promoted to major general.



Back in action for the battle of Churubusco, his army inflicted horrendous casualties onto the Mexicans. In the engagement at Chapultepec, his horse was shot from under him, and Shields “fought on foot, bareheaded and in shirt sleeves, leading his brigade, sword in hand.” He was among the first to plant the flag at the storied halls of Montezuma, receiving another severe wound but refusing to quit the action, remaining with his men until the battle was won. Among his colleagues were future generals U.S. Grant, Joseph E. Johnston, Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, George Pickett, and Stonewall Jackson.

When the war was over, he returned to practicing law in Illinois until his election to the U.S. Senate. After the outbreak of the Civil War, Shields resumed his military career and soon was appointed to brigadier general by Lincoln, and at Kernstown confronted Stonewall Jackson’s forces, forcing the Confederates to retreat up the Shenandoah Valley.<sup>36</sup>

### *City Kids and Country Boys*

To be sure, America in the heyday of Donnelly, Ireland, McGill, and Shields was largely a rural society, its economy primarily based on agriculture.

Nick Coleman, on the other hand, spent his entire life in St. Paul, except for two years in the Navy and two years teaching history in the small southwestern Minnesota town of Tyler. The Colemans were the only Irish in that town except for the school janitor.<sup>37</sup> (Tyler’s annual celebration of Aebleskiver Days reflects its largely Danish heritage, though there was a small Catholic church, St. Dionysius.) Coleman was a city kid who never forgot the needs of the hardworking people with whom he had grown up.

Donnelly, whose family came over from the village of Fintona, County Tyrone, grew up and was educated in the public schools of Philadelphia, then one of this country’s largest cities. Shortly after coming to Minnesota, he built his home in the area he called Nininger City, about as rural a place as one can imagine. He was, briefly, a would-be farmer and, not so briefly, an indefatigable community booster. Except for his six years in the Congress, Nininger remained his home.



*Architect Cass Gilbert, designer of Minnesota’s third capitol, surveying construction from the top of his work (1901). No detail was too small for this master builder. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

Ireland was born in the small village of Burnchurch in County Kilkenny and within a year of his arrival in St. Paul, he was sent by Bishop Joseph Cretin to study in the seminary of Meximieux, a commune in the Ain department in eastern France. Back in St. Paul, he was ordained in 1861, and, except for his years as chaplain in the Civil War, he remained a resident of Minnesota’s capital.

McGill was born and raised in Saegertown, a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania. When he was nineteen, he moved to rural Kentucky to teach school, and after his two years with the Ninth Minnesota Volunteers, he settled in St. Peter. He moved to St. Paul with Governor Austin in 1870 and remained in the city until his death.

Shields was born and grew up in the small and isolated hamlet of Altmore, County Tyrone. He left home in his mid-teens and, after an accident-prone and brief

stint as a sailor, he settled in Kaskaskia, in southwestern Illinois, a onetime territorial capital (and boomtown for immigrants until a disastrous flood in 1844). Shields studied and practiced law for ten years before he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1836. Once in Springfield, his political career took off. His life from the time of the Mexican War until his death took him to several states (Illinois, Minnesota, California, Wisconsin, and Missouri), and he was never so deeply rooted that he would pass up what seemed a good opportunity.<sup>38</sup>

### *Descendants*

Five of Coleman’s six surviving children live in Minnesota (a daughter, Maureen, died of childhood leukemia). Four of them live in St. Paul: his oldest, Nicholas Joseph, who has been a columnist of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *Minneapolis Star Tribune* for 35 years; Patrick, the son

who taught his father all about canoeing and camping out, and is an acquisitions librarian for the Minnesota Historical Society; Emmett, his youngest, who works for a national telecommunications company; and Christopher (Chris), who is the current mayor of St. Paul. Daughter Megan (Micki) Coleman, is a doctor of chiropractic in Mankato, and son Brendan lives in Prague, Czech Republic, where he and his wife founded a school and program of choir music.

Ignatius Loyola Donnelly's oldest son, Ignatius C., was a physician and his second born, Stanislaus James (Stan), was an attorney in whose home, on Portland Avenue in St. Paul, his father's funeral service took place. (Stan died in the influenza epidemic of 1918.) Donnelly's grandson, Stanislaus Dillon (also Stan) was an attorney in St. Paul who in 1923 became partner in the law firm that would bear his name, Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnelly. Two of the great grandsons of Ignatius Loyola Donnelly were also attorneys with long careers at the firm.<sup>39</sup>

Andrew McGill was married twice, and widowed once. With his first wife, Eliza Bryant of St. Peter, he had three children: Charles, Robert, and Lida. Eliza died in 1877, when they lived in St. Paul. With his second wife, Mary E. Wilson of Edinboro, Pennsylvania, he had two children: Wilson and Thomas. McGill's oldest son Charles served one term in the Minnesota House of Representatives, and then was engaged in the publishing and printing business in St. Paul. Governor McGill built the Queen Anne-style home in St. Anthony Park at 2203 Scudder Avenue, designed by architect W.A. Hunt, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>40</sup>

Shields left Minnesota in 1859 and lived in several other states. He died during a visit to Ottumwa, Iowa, and is buried in Carrollton, Missouri. After leaving Minnesota, he settled in California and married Mary Carr, born in County Armagh in Northern Ireland. They had two sons and a daughter and raised them in Carrollton, Missouri. One of their sons, Dr. Daniel F. Shields, lived and practiced in New York City. Although none of Shields's direct descendants lived in Minnesota, his nephew, Lytton E. Shields, and grand



*Governor Andrew McGill's portrait hangs in his Queen Anne-style St. Anthony Park home in St. Paul, now on the National Register of Historic Places (about 1930). Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

nephews James and Lytton J. Shields, were longtime residents of St. Paul.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Ambitions and Dreams***

Coleman, according to his widow, Deborah Howell, ranked his failure to win the DFL endorsement for governor in 1970 as a major setback. And his only other chance to rise in the political arena came and went away in 1978. According to friends and colleagues, he was angered and felt a sense of betrayal when Governor Rudy Perpich, his old friend and colleague, decided not to appoint Coleman but chose instead Muriel Humphrey, the widow of Hubert H. Humphrey, to fill the U.S. Senate seat when her husband died in early 1978.<sup>42</sup>

Donnelly, from the hyperactive life he led, seemed driven by a series of disappointments. His decision to run for the Congress deprived him of the chance to become governor of Minnesota. For decades, switching from party to party, he battled against those who constituted the powerful "establishment." And he seldom won. His dream of making Nin-

inger City an important river city on the Mississippi fell far short; he and his family stayed on long after most of the other settlers had moved away. As for his career as a writer, though he published often and his books were widely read, his work was not received with the critical acclaim he had sought. On a brighter note, the legacy of his last battles in politics with the People's Party was the achievement—though several years after his death—of many populist proposals once considered beyond reach: direct election of U.S. Senators, graduated income tax, managed federal currency, initiative and referendum, active government intervention in the economy, strengthened regulatory commissions, and an eight-hour day for workers.

John Ireland's many years of service to his church and archdiocese seem, in retrospect, to have been a long series of accomplishments. (Since all of his personal papers were burned by the family after his death, much of his own sense of success or failure remains a mystery.) O'Connell cites Ireland's strong advocacy of "Americanism" in the U.S. Catholic church, his conflict with the Jesuits over the establishment of Catholic University, and his independent advocacy of other causes for giving him a high profile that might not have endeared him to the Vatican hierarchy in Rome. For years there were rumors that Ireland would be the next archbishop to become a cardinal, and he was reportedly "cultivating" Pope Leo XIII for this during the early 1890s, but the red hat he may have sought never materialized. The labyrinth of Vatican politics was too complex and too well entrenched, and for Ireland this must have been a disappointment.<sup>43</sup>

Andrew McGill's failure to win his party's nomination for a second term was surely a major disappointment in his life. He had, from all sources, served well and there were no scandals of any kind to taint his record. But he was up against the irresistible force of William Rush Merriam, a prominent banker from St. Paul, who had been elected speaker of the Minnesota House after just one term in the legislature. Merriam, who followed his one-term father, John L., in the speaker's chair, was heavily involved in banking and railroads throughout the 1880s. After he



Major General James Shields in mufti. He was also the only one to serve as a U.S. senator from Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri (1849–1879). Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress, Brady-Handy Collection.

replaced McGill in the governor's office, the whiff of scandal relating to the building of the Duluth, Crookston & Northern Railway swirled around Merriam.<sup>44</sup> In 1888, when he bested McGill for the Republican nomination, Merriam doubtless drew support from his colleagues in the House, who had elected him speaker two years before. He also had at hand the money that he had amassed through his business interests to pay for the many expenses of campaigning. McGill was surely disappointed when he failed to win a second term as governor; nevertheless he refused to give up his interest in public life and enjoyed another "hurrah" in the State Senate.

Shields, according to his biographer, Henry Castle, lived his last years on a small farm in rural Missouri, and, upon his death in 1879, left his wife and children "all that he was able to leave to them as the pecuniary result of his many years of civil and militant office-holding—his few acres of farm land, the diamond-studded swords which had been given to him, one by the State of South Carolina, the other by the State of Illinois—and his blessing. . . . Shields was the good man. His private life was above reproach. . . . rushed from one occupation to another, from one political office to another, he was at home, whatever the duties assigned

to him." In his political career, his good timing seemed to be followed by disappointment, but he picked up and moved on, perhaps, as Castle concedes, because "he had the Celtic faults—too impatient, perhaps, for his own welfare, too much of a rover and seeker of new things."<sup>45</sup>

### *Irishness*

Coleman, Irish from both his paternal and his maternal families, grew up in the mostly Irish parish of St. Columba, was educated at Cretin High School, run by the Christian Brothers, and received his higher education at St. Thomas, founded by Archbishop Ireland. His wit and charm, deployed against adversaries on the Senate floor, was legendary. He strongly preferred the rapier over the shillelagh, an Irish walking cane that by custom was also used as a cudgel. Coleman's mother, according to her grandson Patrick, remained very connected to her homeland, going back to visit relatives and friends, participating in the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and displaying mementos in her home (including a sample of the Irish sod). And Father Finn, the great-uncle, was never far away, retelling the Irish stories with his lilting charm, and singing the Irish ballads, including his favorite, "The Rose of Tralee."<sup>46</sup>

But Coleman identified himself as an American of Irish heritage. "Being Irish was important to Nick, but he saw himself on a much broader scale. He wasn't IRISH; he was Irish-American," says Deborah Howell. "Son of poor immigrants, classic second generation, first college graduate (only Uncle Nick had been past grade school), Democrat, businessman. He was very proud of having been in the Navy. He was a businessman long before he became a politician."<sup>47</sup>

Howell elaborates. "He was interested, and knew the [Irish] stories, and Uncle Nick had lots of stories to tell. But Nick Coleman wasn't a scholar of Irish history or literature. [His son] Pat and young Nick would have more of a bent that way. After reading *Year of the French*, he became more interested, but then he got sick. He was very proud of the antique Irish maps he bought from his hospital bed. Being second generation, he was all about being an American. Yes, Nick was

proud of his Irish heritage, but he had no truck with the IRA at all and constantly argued with young Nick and Pat and his brother David about it."<sup>48</sup>

Ignatius Donnelly, according to his biographer, Martin Ridge, "became fiercely proud of his Irish national origin. 'If an Irishman is hung for murder,' Donnelly chided critics, 'his nativity is freely admitted; but if he distinguishes himself in an honorable walk of life, then it is discovered that he is Scotch-Irish.'" After receiving a generous advance against royalties for *The Great Cryptogram*, Donnelly "exploded in a burst of ancestral pride: 'A good many people believe that the proper occupation for a person of Irish blood is digging a ditch or flourishing a shillela [sic]. They are presumed to know nothing about literature & to ultimately lack those qualities of patience and perseverance which are held to be the birthright of the Anglo-Saxon. I think I have done something to dispel that prejudice."<sup>49</sup>

In the middle of his campaign for governor of Minnesota as candidate of the People's Party, Donnelly published *The Golden Bottle*, a utopian novel in which America magically falls under the direction of the party. The hero of the novel, a young man from Kansas, becomes president of the United States, leads the American army to Ireland, and takes it back from the British. Donnelly's imagination was unrestrained: "The people rose in Cork and delivered up the city without a blow. . . . Wexford, Kerry, Clare, Queens, Wicklow, Kildare were ours, and the mountains of Galway were blazing with bonfires and enthusiasm. . . . with a rush we poured into Dublin, and the American flag was soon flying from the top of O'Connell's statue. . . . IRELAND IS FREE!"<sup>50</sup>

Archbishop Ireland was a prime mover in the resettlement of thousands of Irish Catholics in southwestern Minnesota. According to Patricia Condon Johnston, Ireland "hoped to better the lot of Irish immigrants living in eastern industrial slums by helping them to obtain their own farms."<sup>51</sup> Even in his crusade for temperance, arguably, the archbishop was trying to protect the sons of Erin from the ravages of the bottle. In addition to his efforts in colonization and temperance, Ireland

“unabashedly privileged the training and promotion of Irish diocesan clergy. As one non-Irish St. Paul priest ruefully recalled, ‘With Ireland . . . it was all completely Irish.’”<sup>52</sup>

McGill, whose family was Protestant and was often described as a “Scotch-Irish,” was perhaps the least likely to have marched in a St. Patrick’s Day parade, which during his time was in its festive prime. His Irish identity was surely more restrained, yet in an address shortly after McGill’s death in 1905, Minnesota Attorney General Henry W. Childs eulogized: “It may not be without profit to trace out to some extent, slight though it must be, the antecedents of our subject . . . what were the strains of blood that coursed in his veins? That bigoted and oppressive English policy which denied Ireland religious liberty under Charles I and ruined her industries under William of Orange, was nowhere more severely felt than in the province of Ulster. Antrim, an Ulster county and the most northeasterly territory of Ireland, was more Scotch than Irish, and more Protestant than Catholic . . . [but] there, during the eighteenth century, large numbers sought relief from the oppression of English misrule . . . among those who forsook old Antrim for the new colony was Patrick McGill, who arrived in 1774.”<sup>53</sup>

Shields was demonstrably a leader in the colonization effort for Irish families seeking a better life in the mid-nineteenth century. The area around Faribault proclaimed the origin of the newly arrived Irish-Minnesotans: townships named for places in the old country. Unlike Coleman, whose electability in St. Paul was enhanced by being Irish, there’s not much evidence that Irish ancestry was an advantage or liability in Shields’s series of careers. Other than his brief stay in San Francisco, with a large Irish population, he seems to have settled into rural communities where there was no Celtic concentration. In 1910, thirty years after his death, the local community and the U.S. Congress funded the erection of a monument on his still unmarked grave in Carrollton, Missouri. Reportedly, 10,000 people attended the dedication, including Missouri’s governor, U.S. Senators and Congressmen, the archbishop of St. Louis,

Shields’s widow and son, Daniel, and nephew Lytton Shields of St. Paul, “and other relatives.” Minnesota was also represented by J.J. Reagan, national president of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.<sup>54</sup>



### **Will There Be A Sixth?**

These five sons of Erin were not honored simply because of their Irish origins. It

was their exceptional accomplishments or character that earned them a place in the Capitol.

Of the five, Coleman as Senate Majority Leader arguably made the most sustained contribution to civic life and government in Minnesota. Donnelly, whose roller-coaster career in politics was surpassed by the legacy of his populist agenda, served the state only spo-



*Nick Coleman's casket in the rotunda, 1981. Nine months after the onset of his fatal leukemia, the former majority leader lay in state in the building where he had made his mark. Coleman led the way in passing a tidal wave of progressive legislation. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

radically; Ireland, though he stretched the normal range of influence for a man of the cloth, remained primarily a spiritual leader for Catholics; McGill, who served ably but only briefly as governor and state senator, lasted longer as an appointed commissioner of insurance; and Shields, whose stay in Minnesota was brief and public service to the state even briefer, is depicted—larger than life—at the Capitol, in his major general’s uniform.

Since the bust of Nick Coleman was installed two years after his death, the process of securing approval for any new portrait, bust, or statue has been tightened up. There’s only so much space in the building, so except for portraits of the governors, future placements will be rare. Who else might qualify? Most likely: former U.S. Senator and Vice President

Walter F. Mondale, who also served as Minnesota’s attorney general; former Speaker of the Minnesota House and U.S. Congressman Martin Olav Sabo; and Coleman’s successor as Senate Majority Leader, Roger Moe, who served longer in that position than anyone. All served with distinction, and all are of Norwegian ancestry. One more possibility is the late State Senate leader Gordon Rosenmeier, who ran the Conservative caucus for nearly three decades. His family came over from Denmark.

Speculation on honoring another Irish-American might center on the late Congressman and U.S. Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, though bruises still remain from his 1968 challenge to the iconic Hubert Humphrey. McCarthy’s 100th birthday will occur in 2016. He certainly

made a mark both in his home state and in the nation, yet the pathways to being honored in Minnesota’s Capitol remain largely uncharted.

*Clean for Gene? Erin go Bragh!*

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## Endnotes

1. Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City, Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 39.

2. *Ibid.*, 3 and 47.

3. When Minnesota achieved statehood, the President of the Senate was, for six months, Democratic Senator Richard G. Murphy, who turned over the presidency to Lieutenant Governor William Holcombe, as required in the newly ratified state constitution. Lieutenant governors served as the presiding officer of the Senate until a constitutional amendment in 1972 authorized the Senate to appoint its own president. By then, in practice, the real power was wielded by the Senate Majority Leader, elected by a majority of the senators. Thus, Coleman became the first Democrat to serve as majority leader, and the partisan descendant of Senator Murphy, whose portrait hung in Coleman’s office during his tenure. Coleman loved to point to the bearded Murphy, and ask: “What horrible things could he have done for us to be condemned to 114 years in the minority?”

4. Among these were: income tax relief for the working poor, a program that was picked up by the U.S. Congress and expanded nationally; shifting the burden of aid to public schools from the regressive local property tax to the state income tax; increased state aid to local government; Minnesota’s first minimum wage; rate regulation of public utilities; open meetings of all legislative committees; professionalization of legislative staff; increased workers’ comp and unemploy-

ment benefits; expanded rights for women and minorities; bargaining rights for public employees; enforcement of workplace safety; protection of the environment; state funding of programs for affordable housing; handgun control; health care reform and expansion of benefits; nursing home regulation and reform; party designation for legislative and local government elections; expanded consumer protection; tenants’ rights; assistance for and funding of shelters for battered women; and expanded programs for low income women and their children.

5. From an interview with Deborah Howell, December 28, 2007.

6. From an interview with Pat Flahaven, January 29, 2009. With approval of new commemorative artwork having become more restricted, it’s likely that Coleman will remain the only, or one of very few, legislators honored at the Capitol who did not go on to become governor or U.S. Senator.

7. When Donnelly was elected to the Congress in 1862, State Senator Henry Swift inherited his position as lieutenant governor and, after serving only four months, moved up when Governor Alexander Ramsey was elected to the U.S. Senate. If Donnelly had not run for Congress, he most surely would have become the third governor of Minnesota instead of Swift. Martin Ridge, in his biography of Donnelly, reflects that the lieutenant governor “had two possibilities: the governorship or a congressional seat. Why Donnelly did not press for the gubernatorial nomination is unknown, but certainly the low sal-

ary deterred him; early in the year he wrote one of his many creditors: ‘I shall be a candidate in one of the [congressional] Districts and I think, in all human probability will be elected. If I am, I will be able to do something for you.’” From Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly, The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 62, an excerpt from Donnelly’s letter (March 5, 1862) to J. Persche, a Philadelphia financier.

8. Sources for Donnelly’s long career as a political candidate for four different parties are: *Legislators Past and Present*, Minnesota Legislative Reference Library (St. Paul); three articles in *American Heritage Magazine* by Bernard A. Weisberger, Eric F. Goldman, and Humphrey Doermann; the biography by Ridge; and various articles by John D. Hicks, professor of history at Hamline University and the University of Nebraska. Hicks considered the People’s Party “perhaps the most outstanding” of the third parties, one that “forced the existing parties to take cognizance of issues they had previously tended to dodge or ignore.” John D. Hicks, “The Birth of the Populist Party,” *Minnesota History* 9 (1928): 219. Hicks also credited Donnelly’s persuasive talents for the decision to form a national party in 1892. Donnelly had concluded that to fight for reform through nonpartisan and bipartisan efforts was fruitless, that the vehicle of a national party was required. To do otherwise, he once argued, was like making a gun “that will do anything but shoot” (Hicks, 225).

9. Source for the provenance of this work is Brian



Szott, Curator of Art at the Minnesota Historical Society. The sculptor John Karl Daniels, who did the original bust in the year of Donnelly's death, lived to the age of 103, passing away in 1978.

10. Archbishop Cretin literally selected what he called "two dirty little Irish boys" (Ireland, age 14, and Thomas O'Gorman, age 11) to go to the same place where Cretin had been trained. According to Marvin O'Connell, John Ireland's biographer and professor of history at Notre Dame University, the two lads were plucked "almost literally from the schoolyard" in April 1853. Marvin R. O'Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 39.

11. As retold by Ann Regan in *Irish in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), "Archbishop Ireland, objecting to rowdy behavior of participants, stopped the parades" that had been celebrated on St. Patrick's Day since the 1850s. When enthusiasm and public inebriety peaked in 1901, the archbishop called it off, referring to what he described as "midnight orgies" (page 51). The celebration was revived in 1967 by a group of prominent downtown businessmen, but only after Archbishop Ireland had been in his grave for forty-nine years. O'Connell claims that "nothing during his long life absorbed him as much as did the cause of total abstinence," and, expanding on this, he asserts that Ireland was even harshly critical of his own countrymen who drank in moderation, lamenting that except for drunkenness "Ireland might still be free and an honored member of the sisterhood of nations" (pages 107–08). The author is also indebted to these for excerpts from the life of Archbishop Ireland: Patricia Condon Johnston, *Minnesota's Irish* (Afton, Minn.: Johnston Publishing, 1984) and Wingerd, *Claiming the City*.

12. O'Connell, 138–41 and 143. For two years, the Catholic Colonization Bureau created by John Ireland was the sole agent for the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad in the area of Le Sueur, earning a commission for the sale of homesteaded property.

13. From T. T. McAvoy, "Americanism, Fact and Fiction," *American Catholic Historical Review* 31 (1945) and from O'Connell's description of Ireland's frequent confrontations with elders in the church. On the question of having one, multiethnic Catholic Church, there was for many years an ethnic divide in the St. Paul area of Frogtown, near the Cathedral. The Irish had their parish churches, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Columba, and the Germans had theirs, St. Agnes. This writer was told, by a source that requested anonymity, that as late as the 1960s, only the German families of Frogtown were welcome at St. Agnes. When queried how any-

one would know the ethnicity of anyone showing up for Sunday Mass, the answer was: "They knew."

14. Ireland was also one of the group that succeeded in establishing Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and for this he incurred opposition from Georgetown University, a Jesuit school that feared the new university would be a threat to its hegemony in that town. This is most probably why Ireland was unreceptive to the Jesuits coming into Minnesota. Colleges founded here during Ireland's tenure are, in contrast to others like Creighton in Omaha, Loyola in Chicago, and Marquette in Milwaukee, free of Jesuit control. And while admiring the strength and militancy of the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius de Loyola, Ireland said that nineteenth-century Jesuits "had exchanged their founder's vigor for a mess of the status quo, for that 'conservatism which, wish[ing] to be ever safe, is dry-rot'" (O'Connell, page 280, quoting Ireland in 1889).

15. From James H. Moynihan, *The Life of Archbishop John Ireland* (New York: Arno Press, 1953, 1976) and Johnston, *Minnesota's Irish*, 80.

16. From a pamphlet, *Paintings in the Governor's Reception Room* by the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

17. Memorial address from volume XIII of the Minnesota Historical Society's *Historical Collections*, written soon after McGill's death and published with the formal installation of the governor's portrait.

18. Sources for the life and career of McGill are *Governors of Minnesota*, Minnesota Historical Society, and the Society's archives on McGill.

19. From *Abraham Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, published by Rhodes & McClure Publishing Company, 1897.

20. At that time, U.S. Senators were elected by the legislatures of their states. Shields' first election was voided because he had not been a citizen of the U.S. for nine years. He became eligible later in 1849, ran in a special election to replace himself, and finally, after winning, was seated.

21. Among those settling in the Le Sueur area nearby was John Coleman, who arrived in 1855. He was a great-grandfather of Nick Coleman.

22. Information about Shields from Johnston, *Minnesota's Irish*; Regan, *Irish in Minnesota*; and Henry A. Castle, *General James Shields, Soldier, Orator, Statesman*, read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council of the Minnesota Historical Society, April 13, 1914. Castle claims that Shields's colonization succeeded despite its being "vigorously opposed"

by Archbishop John Hughes of New York, who was then, according to Castle, "at the head of the American hierarchy." Shields persevered, and his vision was later validated by Minnesota's own archbishop, John Ireland. Regan cites several contemporary news sources for the plausible, but unverified, tale of the Irish stacking the polls to vote for their candidates. Two years after the congressional elections of 1858, when 173 votes were cast in Shieldsville, the 1860 census showed only 93 adult males residing there (women had yet to gain suffrage). Republicans claimed that "wagonloads of Irish" crossed the line from Le Sueur County to make up the difference (Regan, *Irish in Minnesota*, 15).

23. Sources include Castle, *General James Shields*, 722–24, and James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 425.

24. From an address by Ireland, archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. James Shields is also honored by a statue in the Statuary Hall collection in the U.S. Capitol, one of the two nominees by the State of Illinois. His statue there, located in the Hall of Columns, was done by Leonard W. Volk, and placed in the collection in 1893. Recently, according to the account of Gerry Regan, producer of *TheWildGeese.com* (2005), Shields, a lifelong Democrat, "may go another round with GOP in a fight for his 112-year-old perch in Washington, D.C." It seems that an Illinois Republican, State Representative Robert Pritchard, introduced a resolution to remove Shields' statue and replace it with one of Illinois-born President Ronald Reagan. To date, Shields has not lost his perch.

25. From news accounts of January 1–2, 1901, in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*.

26. Johnston, *Minnesota's Irish*, 51.

27. From Henry W. Childs, *National Tribune*, March 15, 1906, in the McGill Collection at MHS.

28. Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly*, 58, and Minnesota-born Richard Moe, *The Last Full Measure: The Life and Death of the First Minnesota Volunteers* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 19. Moe's history of the First Minnesota Volunteers explains that Governor Ramsey considered Donnelly among others, but under pressure to appoint a military man, he chose instead Willis Gorman of St. Paul, second Territorial Governor of Minnesota, who had led regiments during the Mexican War.

29. According to U.S. Department of Defense records obtained with the help of Coleman's family, he and a select group of U.S. Navy signalmen received special training in early 1945, at a base near San Diego, as part of the planning for the expected invasion of Japan. The sudden

end of the war in August of that year spared Coleman a first-hand taste of battle. He would later claim, according to Deborah Howell, that not seeing combat in World War II was one of his deepest regrets [from interviews with Howell in 2007–08].

30. The ferocity of this encounter is depicted in Edwin Blashfield's painting of the battle at the Capitol and described by James McPherson in his *Battle Cry of Freedom*, which is the main source for the account of the Mississippi Valley campaign (pages 522–23).

31. O'Connell, 81.

32. *Ibid.*, 74 and 83.

33. James P. Shannon, ed., "Archbishop Ireland's Experiences as a Civil War Chaplain," *American Catholic Historical Review* 39 (1953): 298–305.

34. A old comrade in arms, General J. H. Baker, writing for the Minnesota Historical Society in 1906 and 1907, recalled more details of McGill's military service: "The tocsin of war roused his patriotic heart, and we find him deserting the school room and enlisting as a private in Captain Asgrim K. Skar's Company 'D' of the Ninth Minnesota Regiment, August 19, 1862, at the age of twenty-two. He was elected first sergeant. His service was on the frontier against the Sioux Indians in their memorable outbreak. He was posted at St. Peter and was present as a guard at the hanging of the condemned Sioux at Mankato, December 26, 1862, where the writer, who was in command at that most extraordinary execution, first knew young McGill. He served with fidelity for one year and was discharged for serious disability August 18, 1863, and none too soon, for only nursing and care for weeks and months brought him back to health, but not to a degree to make it advisable for him to reenlist, which was to him then, and afterwards, a great regret" [excerpted from the *Lives of the Governors of Minnesota*].

35. Castle, *General James Shields*, 715–16.

36. McPherson, the Civil War scholar whose history of the conflict won a Pulitzer Prize, says that Jackson underestimated the size of the Union forces and his unit was "badly mauled." But McPherson concludes that this "tactical defeat at Kernstown – yet another Confederate reverse in this dismal spring – suddenly turned into an important strategic victory" when President Lincoln, overestimating the size of Jackson's command, held back a division of Union troops that would have permitted the northerners to finish the job. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 425 and 455.

37. From an interview with Coleman's first wife, Bridget Finnegan Coleman, October 10, 2007.

38. From archives at the Minnesota Historical Society; Architect's Office at the U.S. Capitol; Regan; *TheWildGeese.com*; and Castle, *General James Shields*.

39. Donnelly dropped his middle name, Loyola, reportedly because of its ultra-religious origin (Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly*, 5). The history of the Donnelly descendants is from Virginia Martin, "The View from the 17th Floor: Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnelly and its 111-Year History," *Ramsey County History* 32 (Spring 1997): 4–8.

40. In the McGill archives of the Minnesota Historical Society, there are many bills, receipts, and other household accounts from the period 1888–1905, for expenditures relating to the construction of the McGill home in St. Anthony Park. A. R. McGill and Family: An Inventory of Their Papers at the MHS.

41. Castle, *General James Shields*, 711 and 729.

42. From interviews with Deborah Howell in 2007–08, this writer concludes that Perpich had made verbal commitments to Coleman prior to Humphrey's death. Betty Wilson, for many years a Capitol beat reporter for the *Star and Tribune*, wrote in her biography of Perpich that "Nick Coleman was deeply disappointed when Perpich passed over him for the U.S. Senate appointment. He felt that the governor had promised it to him and was indebted to him because Coleman had helped Perpich secure the lieutenant-governor spot on the DFL ticket in 1970." Wilson also confirms, from her interviews with Howell, that Perpich had promised Coleman the appointment to the expected vacancy. Betty Wilson, *Rudy! The People's Governor* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2005).

43. O'Connell, 348–52.

44. Source for this is an excerpt from John C. Luecke, *The Northern Pacific in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Grenadier Publications, 2005), 150–51. The original reporting was published by the *Crookston Times* in November 1890. The fact that both Merriams, father and son, were elected to be speaker of the House despite such short length of service suggests that the "Citizen Legislature" of that era was primarily a collection of prominent bankers, farmers, and businessmen, the stakeholders who were willing to spend a few weeks every other year to watch over and protect their stakeholdings.

45. Castle, *General James Shields*, pages 733–35.

46. From interviews with Patrick K. Coleman in 2007–08, the obituary for Hannah Kennedy Coleman in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, and this author's personal memories of Father Finn.

47. From interviews with Deborah Howell,

November–December 2008. "Uncle Nick" was Coleman's great-uncle, Father Nicholas J. Finn, after whom the senator was named. Born in Castlegregory, County Kerry, Finn was one of the many young students recruited by Archbishop Ireland for the parish churches being built in the communities settled by Irish families. A year after his ordination in 1919, Father Finn returned to Castlegregory and in effect rescued his favorite niece, Hannah Kennedy, from violence being suffered by the civilian population during Ireland's fight for independence. He brought Hannah Kennedy to St. Paul, where she met and married David R. Coleman; they were parents of the future Senator Coleman. Sources for Fr. Finn's history are: obituaries from the *Catholic Bulletin*, October 26, 1986; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 16, 1986; and records from Finn's personnel file in the archives of the Chancery, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

48. *Year of the French: A Novel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston), by third-generation, Irish-American writer Thomas Flanagan, was published in 1979. It's the tale of Irishmen who, with a unit of French troops, invaded one of the western counties of Ireland, County Mayo, in 1798. The insurgency was defeated in a devastating counterattack by British forces. During the time of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, St. Paul was one of the "Irish towns" in the U.S. where the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was able to find moral support and financial aid for its cause. Among the Irish in the U.S., because of the violent nature of the Troubles, Flanagan's novel was a hot topic.

49. From Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly*, 232. The quotation is taken from Donnelly's scrapbook, originally the galley proof of a speech delivered at Red Wing, Minn., on July 4, 1871.

50. Ignatius Donnelly, *The Golden Bottle* (New York and St. Paul: D.D. Merrill Co., 1892; with a new introduction by David W. Noble, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 210.

51. Johnston, *Minnesota's Irish*, 20.

52. Wingerd, *Claiming the City*, 58, from an interview with Fr. Joseph Guillemette.

53. From the memorial address by Attorney General Henry W. Childs, vol. XIII of the Minnesota Historical Society's *Collections*.

54. Castle, *General James Shields*, 729–33.

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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*The Minnesota State Capitol, where five sons of Erin have been honored, is just to the north of the Cathedral of St. Paul. Photo by Robert W. Larson (2008). For more on Minnesota politics and Irish identity, see John W. Milton's article on page 3.*