

## Music and Politics: Marching Bands in Late Nineteenth-Century Limerick

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The role of civilian marching bands in the social and political life of Limerick in this period is discussed. The impact of the Parnellite split and the resultant violent clashes between band supporters is analysed. The later decline in popularity of military bands is also explained.

Military marching bands, belonging to the regiments stationed in the city, were a common sight parading the streets in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Limerick and they formed an important element in the city's entertainment.<sup>1</sup> Civilian marching bands appear to have become popular as a result of the influence of these military bands.<sup>2</sup> Civilian bands first began to rise to prominence in the 1840s during the great temperance drives and repeal meetings.<sup>3</sup> In March 1840, Father Mathew led a great temperance procession in Limerick accompanied by an 'amateur band', presumably a civilian one.<sup>4</sup> The military authorities had refused to allow a military band take part, as the *Limerick Standard* somewhat sardonically informed its readers:

The [Temperance] body made application on the evening previous to Colonel Piper, of the 38th, in the garrison, for the band belonging to the corps. A deputation consisting of one Patrick Lynch, formerly in the soda-water business, and now a poet and a political writer (save the mark) waited on the gallant officer for the purpose late on the previous night but he went away in an extraordinary state of effervescing chagrin, after receiving a point blank refusal.<sup>5</sup>

The growing self-awareness of the Catholic population in Limerick, and popular public support for nationalist constitutional politics, and to a lesser extent for physical force separatism, meant that public processions were to become more commonplace. Critical to these public processions was the presence of musical bands, and as the military bands would not support the Catholic or popular agenda, so an increased demand for civilian bands developed. Already by this time, a number of civilian bands existed in the city, most located in and representing a particular parish or locality. The Boherbouy Band was one of the first of these local bands to be formed, allegedly in a stable off Parnell St in 1850.<sup>6</sup> By 1860 there was a flute/fife and drum band in St Mary's parish and a brass band for St John's parish.<sup>7</sup>

The most common type of civilian bands were the fife and drum marching bands, followed closely by the brass and reed bands. Pipe bands also featured although they were relatively scarce in the very early part of the 20th century. The most prominent bands in the city were the Boherbouy Brass and Reed band, (commonly referred to as the No. 1 band), St Mary's Fife and Drum Band and the Sarsfield Fife and Drum Band.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its History and Antiquities, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Military, from the Earliest Ages* (Dublin, 1866), p. 341; Judith Hill, *The Building of Limerick* (Cork, 1991), p. 88; *Limerick Leader*, 13 Mar. 1944 (article on the activities of military bands in the nineteenth century).

<sup>2</sup> Criostoir O'Flynn, *There is an Isle* (Cork, 1998), p. 127; Paddy Casey, oral interview, October 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 June 1846, (an account of William Smith O'Brien's reception in Limerick where around a dozen bands attended).

<sup>4</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 Mar. 1840.

<sup>5</sup> *Limerick Standard*, 19 Mar. 1840.

<sup>6</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 13 Nov. 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Des Ryan, 'The Pope's Emigrants', *Old Limerick Journal*, no. 39 (Winter 2003), p. 18.



A significant development in popular political protest began in December 1867, which saw the first in what was to become an almost annual event, the Manchester Martyrs' commemoration in Limerick. The execution of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien had reverberations throughout Ireland, and in Limerick city a monster procession marked the occasion. The procession was led by the Boherbouy Brass and Reed Band, followed up by a fife and drum band from the Irishtown, while the Englishtown Fife and Drum Band, a precursor to the St Mary's Fife and Drum Band, brought up the rear.<sup>8</sup> Each year thereafter a Manchester Martyrs' procession was held well into the twentieth century. It became an annual occasion for bands and trade guilds to show their musical skills and national allegiance. Philanthropic and nationalist societies such as the Ancient Order of Foresters, Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Order of Oddfellows also featured prominently in these nationalist processions, the Foresters even forming their own band in 1873 to represent their society.<sup>9</sup> The Congregated Trades also formed its own band in the 1870s,<sup>10</sup> sometimes referred to as the Mechanics' Institute Band, as did the Victuallers' Guild<sup>11</sup>, whose band was occasionally referred to as St John's Band.<sup>12</sup> The Victuallers' Band featured prominently in nationalist and agrarian demonstrations, often found welcoming home ex-prisoners.<sup>13</sup> Bands were also formed by temperance societies in the city in the later nineteenth century but they did not have the life-span enjoyed by other bands, as the membership of these societies was not stable enough.<sup>14</sup> Public processions in the 1880s often featured a multitude of bands: in 1884 fourteen or fifteen bands marched in the procession as the Freedom of the city was bestowed upon Charles Dawson and Michael Davitt<sup>15</sup> while there were nine bands in the 1885 Manchester Martyrs' commemoration.<sup>16</sup> This era was the apogee with regards to city bands, and the number was to decrease steadily after this point.

The civilian bands of Limerick city became extremely politicised in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the aftermath of the Parnellite split and this was to be the cause of tension between them, and between the communities they represented. The first sign of this division was in January 1891 when Charles Stewart Parnell visited Limerick, an occasion that was attended by most of the bands but with the Victuallers' Band conspicuous by the absence.<sup>17</sup> Following this the Victuallers' Band were abused and threatened in a letter from the Sarsfield Band,<sup>18</sup> this incident marking the beginning of a period of serious friction in the history of the city's bands.

Tension between the Victuallers' Band and the Sarsfield band was further aggravated in February 1892 following a parade through the city by the Victuallers' Band. Both bands hailed from roughly the same area, the Sarsfield Band clubhouse was in Mungret Street at the heart of the Irishtown and the Victuallers' in Gerald Griffin Street (then known as Cornwallis Street) just on the edge of the district. They both had their own 'turf,' however, defined by certain parameters, and the Sarsfield Band took exception when the Victuallers' Band decided to pass by the Sarsfield Clubhouse during their parade. This route was allegedly one not normally taken by the Victuallers' Band and the locals in the Mungret Street area responded by firing stones at the band, an incident which was followed later by a melee outside the Victualler's band room.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 Dec. 1867; *Munster News*, 11 Dec. 1867.

<sup>9</sup> *Munster News*, 13 June 1877 & 27 Oct. 1886. The Foresters band lasted until the mid 1880s.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 June 1877.

<sup>11</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 29 Dec. 1899; *Munster News*, 28 Nov. 1877.

<sup>12</sup> *Munster News*, 25 Nov. 1885.

<sup>13</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 29 Dec. 1899.

<sup>14</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 29 Dec. 1899; Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community* (London, 1968), pp 23-4, many bands in the North of England were also temperance bands.

<sup>15</sup> *Munster News*, 12 Apr. 1884.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Nov. 1885; while they are not all named, most, if not all, of these bands were probably from the city.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1891.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1891.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1892.



Most of the people of St Mary's parish took an anti-Parnellite stand, and used the term 'Federation' supporters. St Mary's Band joined the Victuallers' Band in support of the Federation and the island parish of St Mary's soon became enemy territory for any Parnellite Bands. Violence escalated at the general election in July 1892. After the victory of the Federation candidate a large crowd of Parnellites gathered near the train station and from there they marched, led by the Boherbouy band (playing the tune of 'The Boys of Wexford'), through the town until they came to Mathew Bridge where stone-throwing occurred in which a St Mary's man was severely injured and the situation became more violent. Many were hospitalised as a result of their injuries and a large number of arrests were made. In the vicinity of the railway station many houses of anti-Parnellites were attacked and, conversely, in St Mary's parish the premises of many Parnellites were damaged.<sup>20</sup> The bands leading the Parnellite mob had actually contravened an order from the magistrates banning them from parading the city streets.<sup>21</sup> Rioting again erupted later on in July when Parnellites and anti-Parnellites clashed in Mungret Street, which this was followed by yet more arrests and hospitalisations.<sup>22</sup> This was the start of a pattern of conflicts in the vicinity of two of the main bridges leading to St Mary's parish, namely the Mathew Bridge and Baal's Bridge. These bridges marked the contact zone between the politically opposed communities.

In November 1892 more politically fuelled violence was triggered by the Municipal elections for five Town Council seats. St Mary's Band and the Boherbouy Band paraded the city following the elections, each band followed by a large entourage. The two bands met in Patrick Street where, predictably, a riot ensued. The police quickly scattered the crowds who returned to their respective enclaves, the St Mary's mob smashing windows of the offices of the Parnellite *Limerick Leader* newspaper on their way home and the Boherbouy mob damaging the premises of the anti-Parnellite M.P. Francis O'Keefe during their return journey.<sup>23</sup>

A year of relative quiet followed, helped by the fact that there were no elections of any sort. However, Parnellites in St Mary's parish were certainly active during this time. They were eager to show that the Federation did not have a complete hegemony in the parish and, with bands being extremely important emblems for working class communities in Limerick, formed their own Parnellite St Mary's Band in late 1893.<sup>24</sup> According to local tradition in St Mary's parish, this was the result of a split in the existing band.<sup>25</sup> Oral accounts of the split indicate that this Parnellite band consisted mainly of men from the Crosbie Row vicinity; and cross-referencing the 1901 and 1911 census with newspaper reports of membership confirms that a large section of the Parnellite band came from Newgate Lane, Crosbie Row, Nicholas Street and lanes close by.<sup>26</sup> The Parnellite band seem to have attempted at first to claim the name 'St Mary's Band', the earliest references to the band in the newspapers titled it the 'St Mary's Independent Band.'<sup>27</sup> However, it was eventually to become known as the No. 9 band, signifying their allegiance to the nine members of the Irish Home Rule Party who sided with Parnell during the initial split.

The Federation bands continued to boycott nationalist processions, including one in July 1894 which supported John Daly (at the time a convicted prisoner) in his bid to be elected MP for Limerick. Many Parnellites used this absence as proof that the Federationists were not actually nationalists at all.<sup>28</sup> St Mary's band certainly showed enthusiasm for advanced nationalism post-1897, as divisions slowly began to heal in the Irish Party. The strongly nationalist *Limerick Leader* published patriotic poetry written by members of the St Mary's

<sup>20</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 July 1892.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 July 1892.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Nov. 1892.

<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 26 Feb. 1894.

<sup>25</sup> Joe Malone, 'Crosbie Row', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 10 (Spring 1982), p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Data based on 1901 and 1911 Census compiled by author.

<sup>27</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 13 July 1894.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



Band<sup>29</sup> and it was also foremost among the city bands celebrating the election of John Daly as an M.P. for Limerick in 1895.

The St Patrick's Day parade in 1894 led to another riot at Baal's Bridge after an attempt on the part of the Boherbouy Band to parade through St Mary's parish.<sup>30</sup> St John's Eve, 24 June 1894, saw worse rioting again in the city. According to one source, the Parnellite Nelson Street Band were on their way to St Mary's Fife and Drum band room in an attempt to develop a fellowship with their fellow fife and drummers who were of a different political persuasion to them.<sup>31</sup> On their way there they happened, perhaps deliberately, to pass by the Victuallers band room, home of the other main anti-Parnellite band in the city. A fight broke out between members of the two bands, with missiles first being fired at the Nelson Street Band. The Victuallers got more than they bargained for, however, as the Nelson Street Band had a large crowd of supporters with them and the Victuallers' band room was wrecked and all the musical instruments either smashed or stolen.<sup>32</sup> The Victuallers' Band was effectively finished after this attack, the loss of their expensive brass and reed instruments proved to be irreparable.<sup>33</sup> There was an attempt to reorganise the band in October 1896, which was temporarily successful and the band did manage to make a few appearances over the next two years, however, it did not take part in the 1899 Manchester Martyrs' procession and a short article, in the *Limerick Leader* at the end of that year, chronicling the history of the city's bands, confirmed that the band was no longer in existence. This marked the end of a band which had played a prominent role in the nationalist struggle in the city, particularly in the 1880s.<sup>34</sup>

The bands did briefly unite under the banner of John Daly in July of 1895 during the campaign to have him nominated as a candidate for the General Election<sup>35</sup> and there was even a John Daly Fife and Drum Band temporarily formed in St John's parish.<sup>36</sup> However to celebrate St John's Eve in 1895 St Mary's Band played for St John's Temperance Society in the predominantly Parnellite parish of St John's despite the fact that the parish had its own Fife and Drum band, the Sarsfield Band.<sup>37</sup> When it was announced in July 1895 that there was to be an All-Ireland Band Contest in Dublin, a letter was written to the *Limerick Leader* calling on the Sarsfield Band and St Mary's Band to unite and go to the band contest as the Limerick Fife and Drum Band.<sup>38</sup> Factional allegiance proved stronger than civic pride, however, and the suggestion was not even considered by the fierce rivals and politically opposed bands. Indeed the build up to the band contest saw a renewal of violent clashes between the bands as the temporary unity achieved in July for the cause of John Daly was quickly forgotten. As usual the scene of the first instance of renewed trouble was Mathew Bridge with the Boherbouy Band coming under attack from stone throwers from St Mary's parish.<sup>39</sup> Another factor adding to escalating political tension in the city was the fact that a general election was approaching and canvassing and campaigning was starting anew. The renewal of animosity between the Federation and Parnellite camps in the city is reflected in this newspaper report:

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18 Apr. 1894, letter written by Patsy Salmon supporting John Daly; ibid., 19 Mar. 1894, letter by Patsy McNamara calling for 'Destruction to our enemies laws' amongst other things.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19 Mar. 1894; *Munster News*, 17 Mar. 1894, which placed the riot at Mathew Bridge rather than Baal's Bridge.

<sup>31</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1894.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 26 Oct. 1896; ibid., 29 Dec. 1899.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 26 Oct. 1896. The band had been extremely supportive of the nationalist cause during the time of the Balfour Coercion Act when they appeared on three hundred and seventy occasions upon the release of those imprisoned under the Coercion Act.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15 July 1895.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 22 July & 7 Aug. 1895; it was formed by members of the old St John's Fife and Drum Band, which had struggled since its instruments were destroyed during a clash with the RIC in 1888.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 24 June 1895.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 30 July 1895.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2 Sept. 1895.



The O'Keefeites [O'Keefe was the Federation candidate] also held a meeting, dignified with the name of an open-air gathering. It included all the roughs of Mary Street, which were augmented by several boisterous females, played to Henry Street, a deserted quarter, by the Federationists' only band [St Mary's Band], which had to be protected on its route by a strong force of police. On passing the Parnellite quarter, which they had attempted to wreck on Sunday, they were stoned and ran away.<sup>40</sup>

The aggressive manner in which each community defended their own territory was such that St Mary's Band members were apprehensive about travelling to the train station, which was situated in the heartland of what was, for the most part, a Parnellite community.<sup>41</sup> The prospect of a major riot being caused by the band's presence in 'enemy territory' was increasingly likely as conflicts were erupting in the traditional border areas of Mathew Bridge and Baal's Bridge.<sup>42</sup> In the end the St Mary's Band did manage to get to the train station without being attacked, although they had to be escorted there by a large number of the RIC.<sup>43</sup> St Mary's Band won the junior competition,<sup>44</sup> prompting much celebration in the city.<sup>45</sup> However, on their return journey from the train station they clashed again with Parnellites in Mungret Street, the Sarsfield Band's headquarters<sup>46</sup> but were able to celebrate their victory by playing an open-air concert at the Lansdowne enclosure in front of around 1,000 people.<sup>47</sup>

From early 1896 a more tranquil period was slowly ushered in which eventually led to the end of band related political violence. Unity and solidarity was increasingly evident among the bands and among nationalists in general in Limerick. One reason for this was the release of John Daly in August 1896, which served to bring the opposing factions together. The news of his release was greeted with much rejoicing in Limerick and a massive parade featured bands from both sides of the political divide.<sup>48</sup> There were still some isolated incidents of political violence, for example a Parnellite was very badly beaten, and nearly killed, in Mary Street in October 1896<sup>49</sup> but the large-scale politically driven riots were now a thing of the past. There was a large riot in the Balls Bridge area in April 1897, but unlike the previous riots, the constabulary were the targets of the rioters and this was to be an indication of the pattern of future social unrest in Limerick, i.e. the public versus the authorities.<sup>50</sup> Another example of this, was a smaller riot in Nicholas Street in 1899 where the Military came under attack.<sup>51</sup>

A clear indication that the rift between the bands in Limerick was healed was a large meeting of the Amnesty Committee in 1897, attended by the St Mary's Band as well as the Parnellite bands of the city.<sup>52</sup> The Amnesty Committee was one of the last exclusively Parnellite nationalist bodies in the city. The presence of John Daly at meetings was crucial as he acted as a unifying agent for working class Limerick in general during this period. Daly had the unique ability to appeal to so many because his rise to fame was established during the prime Fenian years of the 1860s and 1870s, an era which, by the 1890s, had already become part of folklore and legend. He was incarcerated during the 'Split' years and thus avoided being excluded by either faction. The rise of the United Irish League, which quickly won the support of all the city's bands from 1899 onwards also helped to end any lingering bitterness in the city.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 11 Sept. 1895.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 20 Sept. 1895.

<sup>42</sup> *Munster News*, 17 Sept. 1895; *Limerick Leader*, 16 Sept. 1895.

<sup>43</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 23 Sept. 1895.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 25 Sept. 1895; St Mary's All-Ireland Prize Band Centenary Booklet 1885-1985.

<sup>45</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 18 Sept. 1895.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25 Sept. 1895.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 30 Sept. 1895.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 14 Aug. 1896.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 7 Oct. 1896.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 26 Apr. 1897.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 18 Oct. 1899.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10 May 1897.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 9 Dec. 1901.



Cork also experienced frequent band-related rioting during the 1879-82 period.<sup>54</sup> These riots were extremely violent, resulting in two deaths and multiple hospitalisations. Some of the riots took place during political demonstrations but politics does not seem to have been the motivation behind the Cork riots of this period, rather it was intense community rivalry sparked off by trivial slights. In this regard the Cork band riots differed from the Limerick riots of the 1890s, where politics was a crucial motivational factor sparking the trouble. It is true that some of the fighting appears to be nothing more than overly excited young men partaking in street fighting with no thought of politics.<sup>55</sup> However, the rioting began with the boycotting of Parnell's visit to Limerick and they petered out after 1895 when the split in the country was beginning to heal. The worst riots nearly always occurred during times of political activity, particularly during election campaigns and, furthermore, gangs often turned on people in their own locality if they were of a different political persuasion.

However there is also evidence that other factors were sometimes involved. It is worth noting that the numbers of young men involved in sport in the early 1890s in Limerick city was relatively small. The strength of the G.A.A. dipped drastically in Limerick city at this time, as it did in the rest of the country, due to the struggle between physical force republicans and the clergy for control of the clubs. Association football (soccer) was not very popular in the city pre-World War I and it gets hardly any mention during this period. There were only three senior rugby clubs in the city and it was only in 1895, with the founding of the Transfield Cup, that the plethora of community based Junior clubs in the city had any chance to actually play each other regularly. The limited recreational options offered by sport during this period probably led to boredom among energetic young men which, in turn, led many young men and women to follow the bands and take part in the ensuing riots as has been noted in Cork.<sup>56</sup>

Another similarity between the Limerick band riots of the 1890s and those in Cork in the previous decade was the fact that the main culprits often seem to have been followers of the bands rather than the bands themselves.<sup>57</sup> The bands were not completely innocent but the main protagonists named in the riots rarely seem to have been band members; there is only one recorded case of a member of St Mary's Band, Patrick 'Halley' Kennedy, being arrested for rioting.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most striking things about the Cork riots was the difficulty the clergy had in exerting any influence on the gangs, one band in particular, the Cat Street Band, defying a priest outright three times. The clergy in Limerick had similar problems where they seemed to meet a similar spirit of defiance. On one occasion, for example, a gang pursued a man into a church where an attempt was made to assault him in the presence of a number of priests.<sup>59</sup> The boys' section of the Holy Family Confraternity was constantly interrupted by fighting between boys from rival communities<sup>60</sup> and in 1892 there was the attack on St John's Temperance Society rooms.<sup>61</sup> The forthright condemnation by a Redemptorist Priest Fr. Bannon in 1895 did have a strong impact, although some openly defied him and called for a retraction while others called him an 'Englishman'.<sup>62</sup> The defiance shown to the Catholic clergy by both the Cork and

<sup>54</sup> Fintan Lane, 'The Band Nuisance', *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society* no. 2 (1999), pp 17-31.

<sup>55</sup> *Munster News*, 3 Aug. 1892.

<sup>56</sup> Lane, 'The Band Nuisance', p. 29, one young man, upon being brought before the magistrates for street fighting with rival band factions, declared that the reason for his fighting was that there was 'no other excitement on a Sunday except by exercising their arms by casting stones.'

<sup>57</sup> Lane does mention one Jeremiah 'Cowboy' Crowley a band member, a notorious street fighter and seemingly a ringleader of the gang attached to his band, however the majority of the named offenders were followers rather than members themselves.

<sup>58</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 July 1892.

<sup>59</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20 Sept. 1895.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Sept. 1895.

<sup>61</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 Nov. 1892.

<sup>62</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 20 Sept. 1895, a prominent Parnellite, J. O'Brien, criticised Fr. Bannon, called for a retraction and stated that if there was no retraction then the organisers of the Young Parnellite Boys' Brigade would not agree to change any of the rules of the brigade as the Redemptorist had requested, *ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1895.



Limerick rioters is interesting to note but it is not particularly out of the ordinary for the time period, particularly in the case of the Limerick riots in the early 1890s.

The local bands did not initially affect the popularity of military bands. A notable example of their popular appeal was the Grand Military Tournament held in the Markets Field in 1887, with the proceeds going towards Barrington's Hospital. According to both the Unionist *Limerick Chronicle* and the Nationalist *Munster News* the attendance was extremely large and 'the whole city seemed to be *en fete*'. The bands of the 3rd Hussars and 2nd Leinster Regiment were the highlights of the evening as they played an assortment of Waltzes, Overtures and Fantasias.<sup>63</sup> Roughly a week after the military tournament, the G.A.A. hosted a band contest for civilian bands, which was also attended by a large number of people.<sup>64</sup> Evidently, when it came to entertainment, the Limerick population was not greatly swayed by politics at this point in time and entertainment was simply entertainment.

This situation however began to change as is shown by the following extract from *The Munster News* in 1891:

In Dublin, Belfast and most large towns where there is a garrison the citizens have the pleasure of hearing programmes of popular music played at one or other public resort, and it used to be the custom here [in Limerick] up to a few years ago. Why the Limerick people should not have such a treat occasionally seems difficult to determine. In the days when the People's Park was Pery Square a military band played regularly every Saturday in the enclosure.<sup>65</sup>

As the 1890s progressed, the influence of more extreme elements of nationalism became increasingly evident with the 1798 Centenary Celebrations being a notable catalyst.<sup>66</sup> Another critical development was the change in local government and resultant election of the so called 'Labour Corporation' in 1899, followed by the election of the ex-Fenian, John Daly as Mayor. Daly was strongly opposed to anything connected with the British military, and this included their regimental bands. He publicly indicated this disapproval in August 1901 when he condemned the presence of a military band at a regatta. Daly, as Mayor, was Chairman of the Regatta Committee but he refused to patronise any event that featured a military band.<sup>67</sup> Two years later when a military band attended the Athlunkard Boat Club Scratch races, a number of letters to the *Leader* reflected the much-changed mood of the public regarding military bands, 'Can it be that the men of the A.B.C. [Athlunkard Boat Club], of whom we are all so justly proud, are going to take a back seat when all Ireland is going ahead.'<sup>68</sup> Another letter placed the blame on the 'craze for "respectability" which is gradually taking hold of our people', adding 'it is positively sickening to see a body of young Irishmen, such as these are, turning their backs on everything national, and becoming so totally West British.'<sup>69</sup> This was seen as especially regrettable when there were local civilian bands available to support local causes.

It is unclear if these letters merely reflected the hard-line fringe of Limerick at the time or if they were accurate barometers of popular opinion. There does seem to be some evidence however that the soldiers stationed in Limerick were not so popular after the turn of the century. Indeed, a few months after the criticism of the Athlunard Boat Club there was an altercation between a number of soldiers and civilians in Nicholas Street, resulting in a tense

<sup>63</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 Sept. 1887; *Munster News*, 21 Sept. 1887.

<sup>64</sup> *Munster News*, 28 Sept. 1887.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Feb. 1891.

<sup>66</sup> Brendan MacLua, *The Steadfast Rule. The History of the G.A.A. Ban* (Dublin, 1967) p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 2 Aug. 1901.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 May 1903.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 May 1903.



stand-off between the two groups until the police arrived.<sup>70</sup> Another such incident occurred in 1899 when a 'mini-riot' developed, again in Nicholas Street, as a group of soldiers belonging to the Cheshire Regiment was beaten and stoned by a group of civilians.<sup>71</sup>

The opposition to military bands in Limerick was simply a reflection of a change in attitude throughout the country. In County Tipperary, for example, in 1904, a group of players and officials were suspended from the G.A.A. for taking part in a match featuring a military band.<sup>72</sup> This contrasted sharply with two G.A.A. meetings in the same county eight years earlier when the band of the Leinster regiment played at one meeting and a member of the R.I.C. won the triple jump competition in the other.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the opening decade of the twentieth century the presence of military bands at local fêtes was discussed by the city's politicians.<sup>74</sup> The general feeling among the Corporation members at the time was that local civilian bands should be promoted ahead of military bands at all times. The emergence of Sinn Féin in the City acted as a catalyst to this growing antipathy. In 1908 a military band performed at Good Shepherd Convent.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to 1867 however, 1908 saw a noticeable reaction with a strong letter of condemnation in the *Limerick Leader* and, most significantly, a delegation of Sinn Féin members went to the Convent to express their opposition. As a result of their intervention, the Nuns agreed that such an event would not occur again.<sup>76</sup>

As the first decade of the twentieth century progressed military bands featured less and less often in the social events of Limerick. They did not disappear completely however and a number of military bands played during the Great Industrial Exhibition of 1906, which was heavily criticised by many nationalists in the city.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes both military and civilian bands took part in the same event as at the Shannon Carnival of 1908, where the Sarsfield Band and the Band of the Royal Munster Fusiliers played simultaneously only a short distance away from each other.<sup>78</sup> At the local annual band contest, a military bandmaster always acted as an adjudicator.<sup>79</sup> However by 1910, military bands were increasingly alienated from the public in Limerick and only played to more sympathetic audiences in venues such as the grounds of the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association.<sup>80</sup>

Initially the civilian bands had largely imitated the military bands, copying their marching style, their uniforms and some of their music. Many members of the local bands were members of the city militia or had fought or would go on to fight with the British army.<sup>81</sup>

With the dawning of the twentieth century an interest in cultural nationalism was becoming increasingly widespread in the city and was receiving the support of the political institutions of the municipality. It was no longer enough for a city band to simply make an appearance at a nationalist meeting and play music. The type of music they played became more significant now as well and they were increasingly stressing the fact that they were playing national music. The United Irish League lent its support to the promotion of Gaelic culture as well, and at a meeting of the city branch in 1900 Patsy McNamara made a point of saying that St Mary's

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19 Aug. 1903.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 18 Oct. 1899.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 23 Mar. 1904.

<sup>73</sup> W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics: 1884-1924* (Dublin, 1987) p. 111.

<sup>74</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 24 Jan. 1906 & 12 Feb. 1906.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 29 Mar. 1908.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 29 Mar. & 13 Apr. 1908.

<sup>77</sup> Unpublished pamphlet entitled, 'The Great Exhibition of 1906' which was kindly supplied to me by Denis O'Shaughnessy, describes the Exhibition and the opposition it met in great detail.

<sup>78</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 19 & 22 June 1908.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 22 & 26 Nov. 1909.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 25 May 1910.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 22 Oct. 1906, description of a 'farewell party' for M. McNamara of St Mary's Band, who was departing for India with the Munster Fusiliers.



Band would continue to support the League by playing 'national music.'<sup>82</sup>

The growing division between constitutional and physical force nationalism in the city was clearly illustrated during the events surrounding the Manchester Martyrs' Anniversary of 1906. The Young Ireland Society had recently taken over the organising of the anniversary and in early November representatives of the Society addressed delegates of the city bands and trade bodies.<sup>83</sup> The secretary of the Society, Jeremiah McMahon (a timber merchant), announced:

that the members of the Limerick Young Ireland Society intend to relinquish all future control in the management of the affairs of the Manchester Martyrs Demonstration. They have been led to adopt this line of action as they believe that there is a great amount of inconsistency and want of proper spirit in evidence at the demonstration of late years, and they believe that more honour can be done to the Martyred Three, who died for Ireland by doing a little more practical work than by holding of an untoward show composed of people, some of whom are indifferent, others adverse, and very few in agreement with principles of the men who sacrificed all for the sake of Irish nationality.<sup>84</sup>

Many of the bandsmen took offence at this statement and the Sarsfield Band delegate asked the Society to elaborate further. Patrick O'Farrell, a commercial traveller from Corbally, who went on to become a municipal candidate for the Abbey Ward,<sup>85</sup> answered that many people had forsaken the policies of the men of '67 and that he did not see the point in having an outward show with bands and banners on one day in the year and then forget everything until the next demonstration. The discussion then became even more heated with members of the Young Ireland Society claiming that all the bands had to be paid before they would attend a commemoration and that the bandsmen always proceeded straight to the pub after the march to the monument was over. It seems the wrangling was fuelled by a generation gap as well as ideological differences, with one of the delegates referring to the Young Ireland Society as 'good, honest young men' and another delegate declaring that, 'the old men would carry on the demonstration without the Young Ireland Society.'

At the reconvened meeting, five days later, the Young Ireland Society was not officially present, although some individual members did attend.<sup>86</sup> The meeting consisted mainly of delegates refuting the accusations made by the Young Ireland Society. One of the charges against the bands that cut the deepest was that the bands had to be financially compensated in order to attend a demonstration. John Crowe, an old Fenian who had been involved with the organising of the demonstration since 1868, declared that he was not aware of any demonstration in which the bands asked even 'a half penny,' giving an example of the Forester's Band and Boherbouy Band attending a demonstration in Ballymacoda for the day with only a penny cake and glass of porter for nourishment, and yet never asking to be compensated for expenses. The Young Ireland Society did disassociate themselves from comments made at the meeting and they stressed that comments made about the bands represented the opinions of individual members rather than the official view of the Society.<sup>87</sup> In the end the commemoration went ahead without the presence of the Young Ireland Society, with John Crowe and Patrick Molloy (a Town Tenants Association representative and moderate constitutional nationalist) giving the orations. The procession was described as 'not as imposing as in former years.'<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 13 Aug. 1900.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 5 Nov. 1906.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 5 Nov. 1906.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 6 Jan. 1911.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 12 Nov. 1906.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 26 Nov. 1906.



As the cultural nationalists of the city accelerated their efforts to achieve an Irish Ireland they continued to add to their list of what was, in their opinion, not authentically Gaelic. In addition to the mindset of the city's bands, the actual nature of these bands was also coming in for criticism. Fife and drum bands, as well as brass and reed bands, were not regarded as authentically Gaelic and owed their origins, directly or indirectly, to military bands. It was no longer enough that these bands played Irish music and attended nationalist meetings and processions: what was repeatedly called for now was a pipe band. There were a number of individual pipers in Limerick during the early part of the decade, with at least one man from St Mary's parish being an accomplished piper.<sup>89</sup> The Brian Boru Pipers' Club had been formed in the city around 1903 but it was simply a club where individual pipers, probably uilleann pipers, played sessions together<sup>90</sup> and there appears to have been a second such club in existence also. In 1904 a letter in the *Limerick Leader*, lamenting the 'absence of distinctively Irish music' from the St Patrick's Day parade added that 'it was to be expected that the two local Irish Pipers' Clubs would at least turn out a band of pipers between them.'<sup>91</sup>

What was being called for now was the formation of a marching band playing war-pipes, which would be in a position to partake in nationalist processions. The letter writer pointed out that the Cork parade, in contrast, featured a procession of one hundred and twenty members from the local pipers' clubs there, which was headed by a band of war-pipers, and he suggested that:

If the local clubs in question are not capable of getting together, say, half a dozen pipers for an occasion of this kind, I would suggest that one of the fife and drum bands take up the subject and form a Pipe Class in connection with their band.<sup>92</sup>

However, as the first decade of the twentieth century drew to a close Limerick remained without a pipe marching band, much to the chagrin of the local cultural nationalists. In 1909 when a Tipperary Pipe Band paraded the streets of Limerick playing an assortment of Irish airs, a letter in the local press contrasted the music of the pipes to fife and drum music:

The contrast between this [Pipe] Band and a Fife and Drum Band was most marked, the former is harmonised, soft and musical with its Brian Boru march; the latter, while a splendid combination of it kind, is not so sweet.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless in 1910 another fife and drum band was formed in the city, the St Dominick's Fife and Drum Band, which served the Dominick St, Lady's Lane and Parnell St area and in 1911 yet another, the Corporation Employees Society Fife and Drum Band was established.<sup>94</sup> Fife and drum music continued to be the principal form of expression for the working classes of the city, mainly due to the fact that the instruments were relatively cheap and there were enough people familiar with the music to give tuition.

Moves were eventually made to form a war-pipers band and by June 1911 these efforts appear to have borne fruit, with the appearance of the St Patrick's Pipe Band.<sup>95</sup> Despite the many efforts to revive Irish pipe music, pipe bands continued to exist in the shadow of the fife-and-drum and brass-and-reed bands of the city and it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that they received any sort of parity with the other bands of the city.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 13 June 1904, this newspaper article contains a letter from Alphonsus Blake, from Church Street in St Mary's Parish, describing the events of a Pipe competition. Alphonsus Blake does not appear in the 1901 or 1911 census but the Blake family does and interestingly for the 1911 Census the family filled out the returns in Irish (only ten families the Parish did so in the 1911 census).

<sup>90</sup> *Limerick Leader*, 9 Oct. 1903.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 21 Mar. 1904.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 9 Aug. 1909.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 16 Jan. & 17 Feb. 1911.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 18 Nov. 1910 & 27 Feb. 1911.

<sup>96</sup> The St Mary's Boy Scouts had a pipe band in the 1930s and 1940s, (oral interview with John English and Aidan Hurley, July 2005).