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"... Notoriously disaffected to the Government..." British allegations of Irish disloyalty in eighteenth-century Newfoundland

JOHN MANNION

REPORTS OF DISAFFECTION and accusations of disloyalty among the Irish in Newfoundland are almost as old as Irish settlement there. Concern over Irish political allegiance amidst British colonial officials came to the fore particularly during the Anglo-French wars that marked the beginning, middle, and end of this 'long' century. In the winter of 1697, for example, Fr. Beaudoin, who traveled with the French forces as they ravaged English settlements north of St. John's, made a number of references to Catholic Irish fishing servants in Conception Bay. Some, he claimed, were treated like slaves by their English masters. Over 30 Irish actually deserted and joined the French.[1] One servant seemed so determined to quit the English, then sequestered on Carbonear island, that he walked over the ice-filled harbour and made his way through the woods to Hearts Content, more than 20 km to the westwards, in Trinity Bay. Here he met up with the French army and relayed information on the strength of English defences.

There were Irish soldiers in the garrison at St. John's in 1697, and a small group of Irish civilians already engaged in the local fishery. Early references, particularly to the latter group in what was by now Newfoundland's leading harbour, focused on the issue of loyalty, and suspicion of collusion with the French. Thomas Joyce arrived in St. John's from Ireland in 1699 to work for Francis Joyce, a planter and perhaps a kinsman. At a hearing held in Fort William, the garrison headquarters, in 1702, Thomas testified to a conversation in French between two Frenchmen in the home of Francis Joyce. Another of Joyce's servants, Henry Neal, who apparently understood the language, was also present. Neal revealed that the two

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Frenchmen, prisoner-servants, planned to steal a shallop from their master James Benger at the end of the fishing season and sail to Placentia. They were willing to take anybody interested in deserting, including soldiers in the fort.[2] The commander there ordered that "if officers of the [harbour] guard came upon tippling houses where all does not appear right they can simply break up the gathering," and "that the same regard be had to houses where French or Irish have been or are entertained." Captain Richards goes on to describe "ye taking up of several French and Irish papists disaffected to His Majesty's service residing here as spys, corrupting and debauching His Majesties servants and other [of] his subjects to desert their service and bring in a French power." These "treacherous designs" included "not only ye Servants of this harbour, but his Majesties servants in ye fort." Even James Benger, an Irish Protestant planter and mercantile agent who provided servants to assist the military, was a suspect.[3] A statement from the leading inhabitants of St. John's in 1702, as the war resumed, requested "That noe one hyres or entertaines any forreigner or Roman Chatholick though a subject of Her Maj[tie] without leave...."

The explicit link between Irish Catholic disloyalty and French designs in Newfoundland seemed to characterize official British perceptions for the remainder of the war. In the winter of 1705 the French captured St. John's. They took 150 prisoners to Placentia and, according to John Roope, forced them to work as servants in the fishery there.

> ... at the end of the fishing season [the French] sent several of ye youths to Canada, some for France ... others are still at Placentia who are said to have entered in the French service, all ye Irish are certainly entered.[4]

Two St. John's planters, prisoners in Placentia in 1709, reported that men had been taken from the English shore "and made servants, and thereby engage them so much to their interest that at this time there is not less than 40 or 50 English and Irish that have declared themselves subjects to the King of France and have several times taken up arms against the English."[5] It is an early reminder that frequently there was no clear separation of economic, ethnic, religious or political motivation. Indeed issues of livelihood and economic security appear to be more important than political loyalty amidst the uncertainties and turbulence of a maritime frontier. But the Irish remained the focus of suspicion. In the summer of 1711 the governor at Placentia reported that "two Irishmen have deserted from the harbour of Ferryland on the English Coast, and are come to Placentia the 8th of July, who have told me of the arrival of the English Merchant ships at St. John's ... They assure me not to have heard talk of any Preparation of Ships of War."[6]

Following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and the opening up of the south coast of Newfoundland to a British fishery, the volume of Irish migration increased, particularly at Placentia and harbours nearby. Most colonial officials viewed this process with alarm. Captain Percy reported in 1720 "great numbers of Irish Roman

Catholic servants ... brought over every year by the Bristol, Bideford & Barnstaple ships ... who all settle to the southward in our plantations." He maintained that should a war with France or another power occur, these Irish would join the enemy and could "be a direct means of loosing the country."[7] While religion, disaffection, and potential disloyalty characterized British comments over much of the century, the main concern was the high proportion of overwintering Irish male servants without contracts or masters who posed a threat to law and order. Governor Rodney's observations in 1749 were characteristic:

> Great numbers of Irish Papists remain in the Country during the Winter to the great Prejudice and dread of the Inhabitants, and if timely care be not taken to prevent the Masters of Ships bringing such Numbers with them Yearly, it may be of the Greatest Prejudice to the trade in general, as they are most Notoriously disaffected to the Government, all of them refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance when tended to them; The majority of the Inhabitants in the ports to the Southward of St. John's are Papists but to the Northward very few.[8]

A local militia, comprising four companies, was raised in St. John's in 1757 following the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. All 14 officers were required to take the oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and abjuration. None of those sworn was Irish although by now they were as numerous as the English, even in the "inhabitant" sector.[9]

In June, 1762, the French again captured St. John's and held it until September. Reports of Irish disloyalty were widespread. The French fleet, comprising five ships and 750 soldiers, first landed in Bay Bulls, a large harbour south of St. John's. Most of the fishing servants there were Irish. They allegedly deserted their masters and joined the French who set them to work widening a pathway to allow the French grenadiers to march on the capital. In St. John's the French were supported by 161 Whiteboys who had been shipped from Ireland for New England that April and managed to escape.[10] The Whiteboys were a militant secret agrarian group concentrated in Waterford, Kilkenny, and Tipperary, important source areas for Irish migrants in the cod fishery.

An officer in the St. John's garrison claimed "the merchants and inhabitants suffered more cruelties from the Irish Roman Catholics, than they did from the declared enemy."[11] Some servants were accused of plundering the properties of their masters. One Irishman, convicted of rape, was refused a pardon by the governor that fall because he was "guilty of many treasonable acts during the time the French were in possession of this place."[12] Lord Colville, commander of the British navy, reported "that three hundred Irishmen had enlisted with the French squadron ... with these they have entirely manned the Garron.... Commanded by an Irishman whose name is Sutton."[13] *La Garonne* was a French frigate with 44 guns.

Colville himself encountered some Irish duplicity as his fleet sailed north to recapture St. John's. The French had shipped out some men, women and children

in two vessels, with provisions. Amongst the group were "23 able Irishmen," all single, whom the commander promptly impressed. They persuaded him to go into Bay Bulls where the Irish would join the squadron. Colville spent two days there, but got no Irishmen.

The third and final French assault on British Newfoundland came in 1796. A squadron of ten ships and more than 1,000 men appeared outside St. John's at the beginning of September. Governor Wallace immediately declared martial law and assembled almost all the able-bodied men in the harbour to assist the garrison and volunteer militia. There were some 560 soldiers in the Newfoundland Regiment but only 50 men available from the volunteer corps.[14] A strategy of deploying men in numbers along the hills overlooking the narrow entrance to the harbour apparently worked. The French did not attack. They sailed south to Bay Bulls which they looted and burned before departing with over 60 prisoners.

By 1796 Bay Bulls was predominately Catholic Irish in origin.[15] In contrast to 1762, only a minority of the population were recently arrived labourers from Ireland. The war itself had made such crossings hazardous. Fewer and fewer Irish servants were arriving in the spring through the 1790s, and fewer still were going home in the fall. A family fishery now prevailed. Many of the Irish had graduated from servant status to become planters and masters with houses and properties. They were major victims of French depredations. In contrast to 1762, there is no suggestion in the documents of Irish disloyalty in 1796. Bay Bulls was the only Newfoundland settlement occupied by the French, and they did not appear again for the rest of the war.

Despite the absence of French aggression in Newfoundland waters, and the rise of a propertied Irish class, there were manifestations of disaffection and disloyalty involving the Irish at the end of the century. Two events stand out: the threat of a mutiny amongst members of the crew of a naval frigate in St. John's harbour in 1797, and an armed revolt in the Newfoundland Regiment in 1800.

In April 1797, sailors in the British navy at Portsmouth complained about poor pay, poor food, and tyrannical officers, apparently with little or no redress, and rebelled. The rising was quickly and brutally suppressed. Five of the sailors were shot. But the mutiny spread to the navy at Plymouth and to the Nore, near London. In the end, thirty of the ringleaders were executed. The government assumed no British sailor would ever rebel unless infected by some external conspiracy, and blamed radical United Irish emissaries for the affair.[16] Four of the ringleaders executed were Irish. There is no proof, however, that any pre-meditated United Irish conspiracy had occurred.

News of the mutiny spread rapidly to St. John's. Plymouth and Portsmouth were important convoy centres for the Newfoundland cod fleet during the war. Early in August some sailors on the *Latona*, a British navy vessel in St. John's, refused to follow orders, apparently in sympathy with the mutiny in England. It was rumoured that crew on other frigates in the harbour would follow. The threat

was quickly suppressed by the marines and officers of the squadron, armed with bayonets and swords. Governor Waldegrave, beginning his triennial appointment, warned that any further insubordination would lead to the death penalty. It was at this stage that James Dayley, a sergeant in the regiment, allegedly told three members of the *Latona's* crew that they had support in the garrison. One or more of the sailors informed the authorities and the commanding officer of the regiment, Colonel Skinner, had all sergeants lined up to identify the seditious member. Bryan Manning, a sailor, swore four times that the culprit was Patrick Walsh. This evidence was challenged by other witnesses. They attested to Walsh's zeal and loyalty as an officer, something subsequently affirmed by his promotion to ensign and then lieutenant charged with recruiting locally for the regiment.[17]

Monetary rewards for information leading to an arrest were accompanied by declarations of loyalty from the squadron and the garrison. One offer of 20 guineas came from the regiment. It was submitted with a statement from all "non-commissioned officers, drummers, and privates" "that a malicious report had been spread abroad by evil designing persons supposing the possibility of our want of duty & allegiance to our beloved King, Country and Constitution ... [we] are not part of [the] general mutiny that is going through the forces."[18] It was witnessed by 25 sergeants and 12 corporals, 2/3 of them Irish. At least three on the list of sergeants — John McLarty, Roger Fahey, and James Dayley — were accused of disloyalty. Dayley admitted to meeting the sailors, adding that if he had "made use of seditious words" he was intoxicated, and remembered nothing. In a blistering address, Waldegrave announced that had he the power, "this vile wretch" would hang. Dayley was first demoted, taken before the magistrates to publicly swear the oath of allegiance, confined to the guardhouse, and sentenced to transportation.

While Waldegrave made it clear that dissent on the *Latona* was in sympathy with the naval mutiny back in England, nothing explicit is said on the precise motivation of those accused of disloyalty in the Newfoundland regiment. All were Irish, but there is no reference to this fact, or any mention of United Irishmen. The secretive, oath-bound movement was still in its infancy in the Irish homeland, and it is unlikely that officials in St. John's would have any knowledge of its existence.

Waldegrave departed St. John's with further declarations of loyalty from the garrison. The governor had expressed concern not just with indiscipline and desertion in the military, but the general condition of the civilian poor. His first impression of St. John's was "the wretchedness and apparent misery of the lower classes. If this was the case in summer, when money flows, what was it like in winter when there is no work." Most of the poor were Irish. One captain in the squadron told Waldegrave that over the three previous seasons migratory labourers, instead of going home to Ireland, bribed shipmasters to change course once they cleared the harbour, and proceed to America.[19] Others, lacking the fare, remained trapped in the severity of a Newfoundland winter, dependent on casual work in return for food and accommodation, or on charity from the "principal inhabitants."

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Waldegrave's anxiety mounted when, in spring of 1798, Ireland came out in armed rebellion against the crown. Most of the action was concentrated in Wexford, a major source of Irish migration to Newfoundland. The rebel forces were composed largely of Catholic farmers, artisans, retailers, and labourers. In the space of a week they had taken possession of most of the county. Waldegrave's letter to the Duke of Portland and the Board of Trade, written in London on June 18, differed from any previous communication on the Irish in Newfoundland and almost certainly reflected news of the uprising.

> Your Grace [Portland] is well acquainted that nearly 9/10 of the inhabitants of this island are either natives of Ireland or immediate descendants from them, and that the whole of these are of the Roman Catholic persuasion. As the Royal Newfoundland Regiment has been raised in the island, it is needless for me to endeavour to point out the small proportion the native English bear to the Irish in this body of men. I think it necessary to mention this circumstance in order to show Your Grace how little dependence could be placed on the military in case of any civil commotion in the town of St. John's. It is therefore to the wise and vigilant administration of Civil Power that we must look to preserve peace and good order ...in this settlement.[20]

Unless the chief justice remained year-round, "the utmost fatal consequences to the island of Newfoundland" would ensue.

Waldegrave may have intentionally exaggerated the numerical strength of the Irish. Yearly statistics on the population and economy of the island were compiled by his office. The Irish accounted for close to half the total winter population around this time.[21] More than 2/3 of the 3,000 residents in St. John's, however, were Irish.

Fears of a rapid transmission of any United Irish ideology or rebellion were unfounded. All the Irish passengers had departed for the fishery before the rising in Wexford broke out late in May and the numbers bound for Newfoundland had dropped dramatically in any case, from around 5,000 in 1788 to 1,000 a decade later. And only about 1/4 of these came directly from Wexford. They were scattered in forty or more harbours and coves along Newfoundland's extensive eastern shores. Most came from southwest Wexford, the area apparently least affected by the rising.[22] New Ross and its hinterland were the core areas of migration, with the large town of Enniscorthy an outlying and relatively minor source to the northeast. There was intensive action in these centres, but less in parishes south and west of the Ross-Wexford corridor. A United Irish structure was in place in most parishes and towns; but the rebel failure at Ross curtailed extensive action in the region. Indeed, there was little overt action west of the river Barrow. There were threats, recruitment, and open gatherings, but in the end south Kilkenny and Waterford did not rise, nor was there much military conflict in adjacent areas of Cork and Tipperary. It was from these places that the majority of migrants engaged in the fishery came.

In contrast to news of the naval mutiny in southern England the previous year, information on the Wexford rebellion of 1798 filtered in slowly to St. John's. Standard summer shipments of provisions, and hence communications, from Waterford and New Ross had been disrupted. Over twenty vessels were recorded leaving Irish ports in the spring. There is no record of sailings in May, and only one ship in June.[23] A vessel owned by the Koughs of New Ross, one of the leading Irish houses in the Newfoundland trade, was trapped in port during the siege of that town. It reached St. John's late in the season with supplies; its captain and crew would have been a major source of news on the rising. By then the Wexford rising had been suppressed, with calamitous losses amongst the rebel forces.

Anxiety about the vulnerability of the island of Newfoundland to foreign and domestic threats remained. At the end of May, 1799, six Irishmen signed a petition to the commanding officer in the garrison requesting that they, and some seventy others, be allowed to move to the mainland. The early fishery that season was poor, wages were low, and supplies expensive. A general assembly, including merchants and magistrates, considered the petition and decided not to grant it. But they feared that if the request was denied without explanation, violence could ensue. This was based on rumours of turmoil in Ireland. The Irish servants were informed that only the governor had the power to grant permission for people to proceed to British North America. But the administration stressed that the Irish "were not prisoners. They could go to England, Scotland or Ireland freely."[24] This latter suggestion was hardly helpful since some of the migrants had likely only just come from Ireland. A straightforward request for economic betterment was presented by officials as a sinister plot. The merchants and masters were less concerned about political loyalties than possible labour shortages, and the driving up of wages.

The most significant administrative decision in 1799 was the appointment of John Skerrett as brigadier-general of the St. John's garrison. Skerrett was a highly experienced officer with a military career extending back to 1761. Much of it was spent in Ireland, North America, and the West Indies.[25] In 1798 he was appointed colonel of the Loyal Durham Fencible Infantry in Ireland. The corps, containing some 250 officers and men, was instrumental in defending Arklow against the United Irish rebels. It was one of the turning points in the failed Wexford rising.[26] Prone to exaggeration, Skerrett claimed later in St. John's that over 1,700 rebels had been killed. The loyalist propagandist, Musgrave, put the figure at about 1,000, and modern historians at 300-500. Most agree that Skerrett's superior strategy and fire power did inflict terrible slaughter on the vastly more numerous United Irishmen whose leaders included Esmonde Ryan, Anthony Perry, Myles Byrne, and Fr. Michael Murphy. Murphy was killed in the assault.

Skerrett arrived in St. John's in May, 1799, replacing Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Skinner as commander of the regiment, then comprising some 560 troops. He was foremost in proclaiming the presence of a strong United Irish faction in St. John's. At times discerning, at times confusing and contradictory, at times prepos-

terous, his perceptions of the Irish in Newfoundland were coloured by his direct engagement in 1798 — "my experience in the whole of the rebellion in Ireland ... to aid in this difficult command."[27] On his arrival in St. John's Skerrett claimed he encountered a certain "Father John, with 40 united men" whom he had despatched to New Geneva (in Waterford) the previous year "to be transported for their revolutionary impiety." They had, he alleged, bribed their way out of prison and escaped to Newfoundland.

> The most ardent missionary to this place was an intriguing priest, Father John, a man of boisterous eloquence with abundant [sic] of talent to do the utmost detriment to society.

Skerrett's estimates of sworn United Irish membership climbed from 40 to "upwards of 80 men" in the garrison alone, and hundreds throughout the island.

There is no record of a rebel priest in Newfoundland in 1799; the description seems to be a derivative of Fr. John Murphy, a rebel leader killed in Wexford the previous year. Like Sir Richard Musgrave of Waterford, Skerrett was writing in the aftermath of a massive rebellion when Protestant paranoia and a loyalist backlash resulted in a highly biased account of the rising. Bishop O'Donel excepted, all the leading commentators on United Irish activities in Newfoundland were Englishmen.[28] They were dealing with a secretive society and an oral culture which they did not understand. In this shadowy duplicitous world, where Irish discontent and disaffection were officially linked with political disloyalty and potential rebellion, rumour became fact and hyperbole ruled.

Suspicions that unrest amongst the poorer Irish in the town had spread to the soldiers increased through the fall and winter of 1799-1800. Some sense of the level of official distrust, and misinformation, is evident in a letter from the duke of Kent, military commander in Halifax, to Henry Dundas late in 1799. Kent maintained that nearly every inhabitant in St. John's was Irish "of the very worst sort," that fully 2/3 of the garrison there were United Irishmen, and that these soldiers could not be depended upon to quell a riot.[29] He asked that a Scottish regiment, raised to protect Ireland from invasion, replace the present regiment at St. John's, and the latter corps be moved to another location in British America.

The first overt challenge to state authority came in February, 1800. Anonymous papers were posted at night in St. John's threatening the lives and property of the local magistrates unless they rescinded a recent publication prohibiting hogs from running at large. Rewards of 100 guineas from the judiciary, and 200 guineas from the leading inhabitants in the town, for information leading to the capture of those responsible indicates the seriousness with which this threat was taken. No information was forthcoming. The incident was strongly evocative of a model of agrarian protest in the Newfoundland-Irish homeland, extending back to the Whiteboys in the 1760s. To the colonial authorities, however, it was a manifestation of potential

political disloyalty. Jonathan Ogden, the chief magistrate for St. John's and the island, and the most perceptive commentator on Irish unrest, linked the protest directly with disaffection in the garrison, and the armed rebellion that followed.

Much of the information on the course of the rising comes from the letters of Skerrett, Ogden, and Thomas Tremlett. All three served in the military. Ogden was a surgeon, Tremlett the captain of a company in the regiment. Ogden had served in the judiciary in St. John's for more than a decade, and was greatly respected by Waldegrave. He was keeper of the public records for the district, and became the first resident chief justice for the island.

The armed revolt was concentrated in the garrison. Permission to raise a new regiment had been granted to Thomas Skinner, chief engineer at the garrison, in April, 1795. Britain decided they needed a regular corps to defend the harbour against the French. The prospectus called for ten companies, each with a captain, lieutenant, ensign, three sergeants, three corporals, four fifers and drummers, and an average of 45-50 privates. Recruiting was local and began that fall, as the fishing season came to an end. Wages, food, accommodation, clothing, arms and ammunition were to be on par with other British regiments. Young Irish servants without winter contracts in the fishery joined the rank-and-file in numbers. Military service was an economic opportunity in an economy where viable work through the winter was often difficult to secure. It was a niche confined almost entirely to the town of St. John's. The Irish also flocked into the auxiliary Newfoundland Volunteer militia; a nominal list of 284 members in October, 1796, reveals a heavy preponderance of Irish recruits.[30] Yet when the French navy appeared outside the harbour that previous September, only 50 Volunteers were available for duty. The others, it was explained, were busy with the fishery. A year later Waldegrave complained the volunteer corps had not turned out once for training since he arrived. James Winter, captain of one of the four companies, again had to explain that the fishery was a priority. Only 57 men appeared for exercises in October. Their main concern seemed to be winter rations for their families and money to buy new clothing. These requests were refused by the governor. Waldegrave was not persuaded when, in the wake of the *Latona* incident, the captains declared on behalf of the volunteers that they "were ready to sacrifice life and property in defence of King and Country and Constitution." The militia was disbanded.

Conditions in the regiment were also substandard. There were complaints about bad food and poor accommodation amongst the rank-and-file. Almost all the food in storage in October, 1798, for example, was inedible. Skerrett's stricter discipline, which included floggings in front of the entire regiment for minor offences, added to the general disaffection. Desertions continued. Tremlett identified "one of the most troublesome companies up on Signal Hill" as a seditious core. It had been placed there purposely "as far away from the town as possible."

> The ringleader was guilty of going into town twice without leave and was confined twice. The troops go to devine worship every Sunday, English to Church, Irish to

> Chapel, and the 20th April was the day they were to surround the church and settle the business... they were to have destroyed all who were not of their party... it appears all the merchants and officers were to have been assassinated.

Skerrett maintained the plan was "to extirpate the loyal part of the townspeople and to destroy the military". The United men were "sworn to sacrifice their dearest friends if necessary" and "only one man and his family [were] to be spared."

Whatever the plan, it was thwarted. Sunday turned out to be sunny and Skerrett decided to keep the troops at exercises all day, canceling church. Fear of discovery prompted some fifty soldiers to flee the garrison. Sergeant Kelly, with twelve rank-and-file, deserted Signal Hill, and was joined by six members of the Royal Artillery from Fort Townshend. They took 23 stands of arms and ammunition. Tremlett quickly discovered the defections from Signal Hill and raised the alarm. The remaining conspirators were prevented from joining the deserters at the powder shed near Fort Townshend. The latter retreated to the woods, making for the "tilts" or cabins used especially by the Irish in St. John's for winter logging. Skerrett ordered every officer and soldier to arms and despatched units to secure "all the distant harbours" to block any escape. Three of the deserters were sent to town with money to procure provisions. One of them, "King, a boy," went to Signal Hill, surrendered, and led the military to the mutineers. Gunfire was exchanged, and two more deserters were captured. They apparently divulged what they claimed they knew of the plot and this was supplemented by letters left behind. Within two weeks, all but three of the deserters had been apprehended. Skerrett ordered a court martial, noting ominously that "about 12 will be sentenced to death." All were found guilty. Five of the ringleaders were hanged by the powder shed under Skerrett's supervision, the rest despatched to Halifax to be dealt with by the Duke of Kent. They too were sentenced to death and were marched through the town to Fort George on Citadel Hill, followed by a cart draped in black crepe carrying eleven black coffins.[31] It was witnessed by the regiment, which had been transferred from St. John's after the rising. Eight of the prisoners had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment; the remaining three were hanged.

II

Despite a century of sporadic disaffection amongst the Irish in Newfoundland, an armed revolt such as this had no precedent. Nor did any take place subsequently. Several key questions relevant to the Irish-Newfoundland identity and experience emerge. Was the mutiny of 1800 overwhelmingly or exclusively an Irish affair? If so, to what extent was it linked to the rebellion of 1798, a delayed diffusion through migration and communications from the southeast? Was it more a response to local concerns, specifically social and economic grievances in the garrison and amongst the more marginalized Irish in the town and beyond?

English officials saw the recent troubles in Ireland, particularly 1798, as primary. And they argued that the revolt could be revitalized, with serious repercussions for the general welfare of Newfoundland. "... I am firmly of the opinion," Ogden informed Vice-Admiral Waldegrave in July,

> after taking the whole of what has passed into view that the security of the trade and fishery, nay, the security and salvation of the island itself, will entirely depend upon a proper military force at this place with sufficient strength to afford small detachments to some of the outharbours to the southward to watch their motions, and assist the magistrates when necessary. This force to render security effectual cannot be less than 800 or 1,000 men, particularly while Ireland is in such a state of ferment as it has been and is likely to continue till the business of the union is settled, for the events of Ireland have heretofore and will in a great measure govern the sentiments and actions of the far greater majority of the people in this country.

The Duke of Kent was more explicit on Irish disloyalty "both in the troops and amongst the inhabitants" and recommended that "troops quartered in Newfoundland .. be composed of men in whom dependance may be placed and not of Irishmen." He suggested a Scotch, English or German force be sent to strengthen the Newfoundland regiment "but on no account Irish." Kent was especially concerned about the number of Irishmen in the company of Royal Artillery, established in St. John's in 1789. Perhaps because of its superior arms and expertise, and the revelation that the company contained a number of the disaffected, the Duke urged Dundas that "these Irish gunners ... be replaced by English."

Information on the uprising was supplied to Halifax by Skerrett. He reported that apart from "two English boys amongst the United men", the rebels were Irish. He apologised for any English complicity, pardoned King for informing, and Mortimer, whom he reported had been indoctrinated. What no official knew was how many soldiers had taken the oath. Tremlett's assertion that "the English in the regiment are loyal but the Irish are all in the plot" is speculation, at least as far as the latter are concerned. Information on the administration of a secret oath, and particularly what it might contain, is hazy. Despite his experience in Ireland in 1798, and his position as military leader in St. John's, Skerrett was vague, referring only to "papers and songs on revolutionary subjects," "their infernal views," and "infernal religion." A few of the captured confessed that they had sworn

> to be true to the old cause and to follow their heads of whatever denomination. Although those heads are not to be known to them till the moment a plan is to be put into action, all this one evidence [informant] has declared originated from letters received from Ireland. Although a United Irishman, he was yet but a novice, and was not so far let into the secret to know who the letters were addressed to, or who from.

Charles Pedley, writing in 1862, maintained there was still a recollection of the rising amongst the oldest inhabitants in St. John's. He cites the evidence of Nicholas McDonald, who had sworn as follows:

> 1st "By the Almight Powers above, I do persevere to join the Irishmen in this place'
> 2nd "I do persevere never to divulge the secrets made known to me'
> 3rd "I do persevere to aid and assist the heads of the same, of any religion.'

After each oath, he kissed the book. McDonald believed over 400 had taken the oath in the town. He also described secret signs and passwords which allowed others sworn to know that he was a member.[32]

Tremlett does add some detail:

> ... since the rebellion in Ireland, the rebel emissaries have been administering oaths to the Irish in every part of the island ... I am acquainted with their words, signs, tokens, oaths, etc. and it is ... worse than what we hear it was in Ireland or America. The oaths increase in turpitude ... you would think Robespierre might have received instruction from them... They are organized under a Directory of five men whose names are not as yet discovered.... [The] Oaths are made in secrecy to support the cause of the United Irishmen and they are sworn to sacrifice their dearest friends if necessary. Their signs and words are ready as in Ireland.

On the night sergeant Kelly and his fellow soldiers deserted Tremlett's company on Signal Hill, their slogan, according to Tremlett, was "Death and Liberty."

Whatever its nature, all observers agreed that a secret oath was taken. Ogden reported that two or three of those deserters captured who had informed on the others admitted they "had taken the oaths of the United Irishmen administered by an arch-villain Murphy who belonged to the regiment." "The management of the conspiracy," Skerrett suggested,

> appears to have been under the direction of some united men in town, aided by that wretch James Murphy ... who is an artful bigot [and] undertook to get as many disciples to their infernal religion as he could ... the next step was to break down their sensibility and then unite them ... we are everywhere surrounded by traitors.

Even James Dayley turned up at the height of the action, on a commercial vessel. He had escaped his sentence of 1797. Skerrett had Dayley arrested and placed on board a man-of-war. There was naturally much uncertainty amongst officials on the origins and extent of disloyalty. Tremlett asserted that "this rebellion started in companies sent out from Ireland." But the ten companies constituting the Newfoundland Regiment were recruited in Newfoundland. Skerrett's suggestion that the revolt was directed from the town is not shared by other observers, but almost

certainly there were sympathizers and at least passive support. "Various have been the reports on this business," wrote Jonathan Ogden,

> the town to the amount of 2, 3, or 400 men mentioned as privy or concerned ... and of acting in concert with them ... but no names have been particularly mentioned, so as to bring the proof home. In fact, we were at one time in such a situation, as to render the policy of acting very doubtful, until more force should arrive, as we knew not who we could depend on for support in case of resistance, having every reason to believe the defection was very extensive, not only through the regiment, but through the inhabitants of this and all the out harbours, particularly to the southward, almost to a man have taken the United Oaths.

While the population south of St. John's and around to Placentia was, by 1800, overwhelmingly Irish in origin, disloyalty on the scale suggested by Ogden and others was highly unlikely. There is some evidence of political activity south of St. John's. Skerrett informed Kent that "Mr. Baker, a respectable man from Bay Bulls, has said that there are upwards of 300 United men in the garrison ... and that James Murphy has had a correspondence with the united men to the southward." This information Baker apparently received from his wife "who is a woman of Newfoundland and is connected with the United People."[33]

Placentia was, like St. John's, a major centre for Irish migrations in the 18th century and had strong Wexford connections through merchant trade.[34] An oral tradition of the Wexford rebellion survives there. Indeed a number of families in the town and surrounding bay trace their origins to 1798. Placentia and the coves and harbours nearby were by then primarily Irish. The town had a small garrison; it was the only one on the island's extensive south coast. Clearly the administration in St. John's was concerned about Placentia. A week after the desertions in St. John's Tremlett recommended that at least 100 extra troops be sent there and Skerrett claimed that the "United men ... have been destroying houses and plundering the well affected." There is no record of such depredations. Only 13 soldiers were sent round, and later that summer governor Pole despatched a naval frigate from St. John's "to show the strength."

There is evidence of civilian support for the deserters in St. John's. Some were free for two weeks and could not survive in the woods without food. "... despite all the precautions" Tremlett reported "the deserters have gotten some provisions from the townspeople." There is no evidence that they received any shelter. One was captured in the loft of the Catholic chapel by William Haly, a Protestant from Cork who, like Skerrett, had fought the rebels in 1798 and subsequently was appointed brigadier major in the Newfoundland Regiment.[35] "Ten of them are .... skulking in the woods" (Tremlett again, April 30) "the rest are now safe in irons." Two of those not captured were considered ringleaders: Sergeant Kelly, the only officer known to defect, and James Murphy. "The traitor Kelly has been seen at Gilman's house in Kelligrews" [Conception Bay]. Skerrett informed Kent, May 10. "Kelly said

there were 200 soldiers in the Nfld Regt. and Royal Artillery sworn to rise with the United men."

Roughly 2/3 of the 600 or more dwellings in St. John's were Irish. And there were Irish servants in many of the remaining households. Even if only a minority were sympathetic one would imagine the small band of deserters could be sequestered in "safe" houses. But St. John's was physically small (a mile long, 1/4 mile deep), the sheriff, constables, magistrates and other officials were scattered through it, and the forts with their garrisons strategically placed on the periphery. Providing sanctuary in such a village ambience would be difficult.

Irrespective of ethnoreligious background, the "principal inhabitants" were consistently opposed to any individual or faction posing a threat to private property. Richard Routh, the chief justice, claimed the merchants' nightly patrols, organized to defend their premises, had "averted a disaster" in 1800. Following the arrest of the conspirators, the merchants and traders presented Skerrett with 100 guineas for the "loyal soldiers." Most of the leading inhabitants were Anglican English. They owned around 2/3 of all properties in the town.[36] The rest was in Catholic Irish hands. Irishmen of substance were opposed to the rising. They looked to their leader, Bishop O Donel, who was vehemently opposed. O Donel was recruited by the leading Irish inhabitants in St. John's following permission in 1783 from the governor, with the approval of the magistrates and principal Protestant settlers, to build a Catholic chapel and appoint a resident priest. Son of a well-to-do farmer in Knocklofty, a few miles west of Clonmel in south Tipperary, ODonel was ordained at the Irish Franciscan college of St. Isodores in Rome. He taught theology and philosophy at the Irish Franciscan college at Prague for four years, and in 1767 was appointed prior of the Franciscan house in Waterford.[37] Between 1779-1782 he was head of the order in Ireland.

O Donel was raised and had lived in parishes along the river Suir, for decades a corridor of migration for young men engaged in the Newfoundland fishery. He spoke Irish (essential for this mission) and was known to the Waterford merchants established in St. John's. As a resident of Waterford, he would also be familiar with the annual spring migrations to the fishery, nearing its peak at this time. "The bulk of the inhabitants of Newfoundland" he informed Bishop Talbot of London prior to his departure "are ignorant labouring men from this neighbourhood". This was the phraseology too of the colonial authorities, and it did not change up to 1800. Despite a common religion, ethnicity, language, and geographical origin, O Donel was socially and politically closer to the conservative Protestant administration than he was to the great majority of his fellow Irish in St. John's. But the principal support came from the more propertied Catholic Irish in the town. In 1794 twenty-one of the leading Irish inhabitants signed a petition to appoint O Donel bishop of Newfoundland. Three were priests, the rest laymen. Most were merchants or traders from southeast Ireland. Their leader was Luke Maddock of Waterford and St. John's. He had been instrumental in recruiting O Donel a decade before.

Maddock was present when the rising occurred in 1800, as were a number of the other petitioners. They included Timothy Ryan, Henry Shea and Thomas Meagher from O Donel's homeland in south Tipperary, William Coman, Patrick Power and James Power of Waterford, and John Wall. All were engaged in trade in St. John's, most of them by now on their own account. O Donel's supporters in 1794 also included three men who were members of the Newfoundland Regiment in 1800: David Duggan and Martin Delaney, both surgeons, and the influential John Bulger, captain of a company. This group formed the core of an expanding Irish middle class in the town. Like O Donel, their loyalty to the government was not in doubt.

O Donel was pivotal in the maintenance of good order amongst the mass of Irish in St. John's and he was tested as early as April, 1785, when a group of Irish (men, women, and children) surrounded the Congregational chapel to protest alleged anti-Catholic sermons by Rev. John Jones. O Donel defused the situation, actually defending Jones, "... you may rest assured that I wish for nothing more than we may live in such tranquility and good will towards each other." Governor Campbell announced that O Donel had done more for peaceable relations in one winter than some governors had managed through their full triennial term. In 1792 Governor King thanked him publicly "for the unremitting pain I've taken these 8 years in keeping the rabble of the place amenable to the laws."

O Donel typified the policy of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland at this time. Loyalty to Britain was a central tenet in a strategy to gradually gain concessions for the mass of Irish Catholics. The relief acts of 1778 and 1782, which resulted in O Donel's appointment, are examples that the policy could produce results. The Catholic bishops were politically and socially conservative. They were united in their opposition to violence and revolution. John Troy, bishop of Ossory (Kilkenny) when O Donel was head of the Franciscans, opposed the American war of independence. The "republicans" he characterized as a Puritan Calvinist party, "the fiercest enemies of Catholicism."[39] Troy became archbishop and was O Donel's chief correspondent and mentor. Both men were vehement in their denunciation of the French Revolution. O Donel wrote Troy in 1793,

> We had 300 French prisoners here during the summer; their officers were at liberty, and I must own I did not like to see them coming every Sunday to my chapel with large emblems of Infidelity and rebellion plastered on their hats; it was much more pleasing to see 3 companies of our Volunteers headed by their Protestant officers with fifes and drums coming to the chappell to be instructed in the details of Religion and Loyalty.[40]

O Donel was equally critical of '98. "... the Rebellion in Ireland" he informed bishop Plessis was a "disgrace to our Religion." Two rebel priests had been hanged, six transported:

> ... the deluded wretches who were taught to believe by their evil-minded designing leaders, that they were fighting for their Religion, while they were transgressing the Laws of God and their lawful sovereign.... Thus have those hotheaded Republicans lately returned from France imbibed Jacobin principles and brought indelible infamy on our holy Religion that breaths nothing more than loyalty and obedience to the laws of God and the constituted authorities.

Criticism of the rebellion by the Irish Catholic hierarchy was even more strident. Following atrocities such as the burning of Protestants in a barn at Scullabogue in Wexford, the loyalists burned chapels and casually executed suspects. In an attempt to retain government support and curtail reprisals, Bishop Caulfield of Wexford excoriated the rebels as "an ignorant multitude ... an armed and inebriated rabble" and the seditious priests "the very faeces of the church." O Donel's fellow Franciscans at the convent in Wexford town, Patrick Lambert and Thomas Scallon, successors as bishops of Newfoundland, dismissed the insurgents as "a drunken and infuriated rabble." "We hold in abhorrence the conduct of a few misguided clergymen who joined the rebels." The Franciscans even gained the praise of the loyalist propagandist Richard Musgrave for their efforts to save Protestant lives after the rebels captured the town.[41]

O Donel made a direct connection between the rising in St. John's and the Irish rebellion. He admitted that there were some disloyal Irish in the town prior to the desertions from the garrison. But Skerrett could report to the Duke of Kent in the midst of the rising:

> The titular Roman Catholic bishop ____ Donald, who is a very valuable man, I have had frequent communication with. He says if there is danger in the United People, it is with this regiment. His flock are now very steady.

More than a year later Skerrett again emphasized the importance of O Donel in maintaining law and order:

> The Roman Catholic Bishop O Donel, whom I have reason to say is a very good man, he wishes to preserve order amongst his parishioners and is well attached to our government. He has often told me with much concern, that the people under his charge have fallen off from their allegiance and duty. That they were so very bad, at one moment, that he was determined to quit the country. There is something so abhorent in the doctrine of these infernal United men ...

O Donel matched Skerrett himself in his proclamations of loyalty. He prescribed prayers on Sundays and holy days for the monarchy, and had his priests encourage parishioners to observe English law.

> We most earnestly entreat and by all the spiritual authority we hold, ordain that all missionaries oppose with all the means in their power all plotters, conspirators, and favorers of the infidel French, and use every endeavour to withdraw their people from the plausible cajolery of French deceit; for the aim of this conspiracy is to dissolve all bonds, all laws by which society is held together, and more especially the laws of England which are to be preferred to any country in Europe.[42]

An official acknowledgement of O Donel's contribution came in 1804 when the principal Protestant inhabitants, magistrates, and other officials supported a petition for a government pension. Next to Skerrett, they declared, he

> was the person who saved this valuable island from becoming a scene of anarchy and confusion by making the most unwearied exertions and using the extensive influence he had acquired over the lower classes by which means they were prevented from joining the mutineers of the Newfoundland Regiment at a time when General Skerrett had not sufficient force to oppose such a dangerous combination.[43]

Governor Gower, in approving the petition, added that

> during the late rebellion in Ireland, corresponding sensations were, at one period felt in St. John's. But in justice to the Romish clergy in Newfoundland, it must be remarked that ... far from exciting, or even countenancing such views they were the first to discover and disclose them, and to them it is chiefly owing that a horrid conspiracy formed in that place was suppressed.[44]

Religion was not a factor in the rising. Colonial administrators were as vague about Catholicism as they were about United Irish ideology and objectives. For most British observers in Newfoundland "Irish" and "Catholic" were synonyms, the latter a badge of ethnicity. Governor Pole noted on his arrival in St. John's after the rising that while there was no

> apprehension of any important disturbance at Newfoundland whilst Ireland is in subjection, ... I do believe the Catholics and Irish are more clearly connected in this island since the rebellion in that kingdom, than they were before, such is the general opinion, and even admitting it to be so [there are] very few loyal troops at St. John's ... whether or not the 6th Regt is composed of soldiers adapted to this service is not for me to decide, but they are stated to be formed of Catholics and not of the best complexion to oppose any disturbance made by people of that faith.[45]

Despite O Donel's assurances that his congregation was loyal, Skerrett remained suspicious. "A strong Roman Catholic faction has been the cause of all the mischief" he informed Kent "for there certainly exists no cause of complaint that they should thus violate their duty to their king and country." He later asserted that

"there are many thousands of United men in Newfoundland encouraged by priests who came from Ireland. In Conception Bay a priest boasted of 400 converts to the Roman Catholic religion. It is hard to struggle against a strong Roman Catholic faction."

O Donel was in a delicate position. He himself indirectly acknowledged Catholic complicity in a defensive letter to Plemis:

> I have a vast heap of trouble on my hands as I must be very soon preparing no small number of the Newfoundland Regiment for death. Those villains who formed a plot to take and plunder the town, were strictly bound together with the infamous link of the United Irishmen's Oath, and are supposed to have been determined to meet at mass on the 20th of April and proceed thence to the Protestant church and make prisoners of all that were there (but malice reports to murder them) and then take possession of the 2 garrisons and make their escape to Boston .... The people of the town are quiet and amenable to the laws of God, the land and the church.[46]

There was no clear link between Catholicism and United Irish ideology; indeed they were frequently in opposition. Kevin Whelan has shown that only a tiny minority of Wexford priests actively supported the rebellion. And all the bishops were loyal. Some United Irish leaders were critical of the power of the Catholic church. Yet there were sectarian atrocities in '98. Loyalist propagandists such as Musgrave portrayed the rebellion as a religious war. There was no evidence of serious sectarian conflict in Newfoundland in the 1790s. Virtually all conspirators, as far as we know, were Catholic Irish, members of O Donel's parish. This allowed propagandists such as Skerrett, with his '98 experience, and revelations about the Sunday plot, to focus on religion as a factor. His comments never progressed beyond the level of innuendo. Interestingly, Jonathan Ogden's judicious summary does not mention religion at all.

Political ideology was not important in the armed revolt of 1800. At first glance the rising does appear rooted in '98. Much that is evocative of the United Irishmens' organization in the southeast, particularly in Wexford, reappears in Newfoundland. There were, it is claimed, a directorate, a cellular structure, a secret oath, signs and symbols, and, crucially, a resort to arms. But for what purpose? What did they hope to achieve? What exactly was "the old cause"? Concepts such as republicanism, Jacobinism and revolution were remote and irrelevant in a place like Newfoundland. More than half the population were Protestant English but, irrespective of ethnic origins, religion, or social class, all but a handful of the island's inhabitants were intrinsically loyal or politically passive.

Almost all colonial leaders, military and civilian, when reporting on disaffection and potential disloyalty, focused on the Irish poor, most of whom were illiterate. Some spoke Irish only, or halting English. Although dominant numerically, particularly in St. John's and much of the Avalon, there is little evidence that they were politicized or politically aware. Serious group violence, such as the

killing of Lieutenant Lawry in 1794 for impressing young men in St. John's, was rare.[47] There are records of individual acts of violence in the turbulent 1790s, but they were related to economic or social grievances. Communal disaffection was normally expressed in peaceful petitions or memorials to the authorities. Sustenance and economic survival were the chief concern. They relied overwhelmingly on their social and economic masters, many of whom were English.

Disaffection and disloyalty in the garrison were largely a consequence of social and economic grievances there. Food, clothes, accommodation and wages were all substandard. Skerrett noted the only defence offered by the deserters at court martial was that on joining the regiment it was understood they would be released each season to prosecute the fishery. It is interesting in this context that the rising occurred at the beginning of the fishing season and one that faced serious economic difficulties. Skerrett also noted that government restrictions on house construction and subsistence agriculture were a major source of disgruntlement amongst the Irish poor. During the American Revolution both volunteers and regular soldiers with families were given time off to tend to their potato gardens, and were assisted by young unmarried men from the garrison.

In 1797 sixty or more soldiers were sent to Halifax, causing concern in the garrison at St. John's. Relocation could be disruptive for soldiers with roots in the local community. Desertions were common prior to 1800. A combination of poor military conditions and the competing demands of a commercial cod fishery led to the decline and disbandment of the volunteer corps between 1797-1798. Similar forces affected the soldiers in the regiment. But this was also true of regiments elsewhere. It was hardly sufficient reason to resort to armed mutiny.

Ogden was convinced their objective was "to destroy, plunder, and set off for the States."

> Although we are at present without any immediate apprehension of danger, we have no reason to suppose their dispositions have changed, or that their plans of plunder, burnings & c., are given up, but only waiting a proper opportunity to break forth. The most probable time for such an event would be towards the close of the winter, when the ships of war are absent, the peaceable and well-disposed part of the community off their guard, and no possibility of succour for two or three months, or of even conveying intelligence of our situation. If such has been their plan, of which there is little room for doubt, though I believe more for motives of plunder than of conquest, either of which would be equally destructive, it would be absurd to suppose it might not take place again ...

O'Donel also believed that plunder and escape were the primary objectives. If so, one has to ask what kind of booty was available and transportable by sea, and how many vessels and men would be involved? It is difficult to see how sworn United men in the outharbours could participate in such a localized plan. A single ship with fifty men — the generally accepted number of mutineers — could sail from St.

John's to Boston. The Canadian coast was not heavily patrolled in the spring; and Irish servants had been absconding to the mainland since the early 18th century. Sometimes they did so on shallops stolen from their masters. In 1780 eight army deserters were sentenced to be shot. While it is simplistic to argue that the primary motivation for an armed revolt by disaffected soldiers was to abscond to America, they may have been reduced to that as the chances of achieving other goals slipped away.

Apart from '98, there were precedents in Ireland for the events of 1800 in Newfoundland. The military regime in both places had many similarities. Ireland had experienced a dramatic increase in its armed forces in the 1790s, with the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars. Catholics were widely recruited. The composition and command structure of the army in Ireland resembled the Newfoundland Regiment. Most soldiers in both places were poor. Few advanced beyond the rank of private. Only two of the 29 officers of the RNR in 1795 had Catholic Irish names.[48] The Catholics enlisted not out of any fervent sense of loyalty but to ward off unemployment and poverty. Conditions in the Irish army were no better than in Newfoundland or any British possession. In addition to the standard service grievances, the Catholic privates were sometimes prohibited from worship or forced to attend Protestant services.[49] As the United Irish political movement took root, disaffected Catholic soldiers joined.

Some ringleaders were executed.[50] Musgrave claimed the yeomanry corps in Carrick-on-Suir, for example, was full of United men. He cites the case of Michael Bohan, a baker in Waterford city, and a member of the yeomanry there. Bohan and some fellow-conspirators were actively recruiting in Waterford and Carrick for the 1798 rebel campaign. Were the insurgents successful in capturing Ross, the plan was to link up with United men across the river Barrow in southeast Kilkenny, and march on Waterford. With the collapse of the rising, many Catholics left the army. The yeomanry became increasingly a reactionary Protestant force. This coincided with a campaign of loyalist terror that involved torture, executions, imprisonment and convict transportation.

Events in Ireland in the aftermath of '98 did influence the thinking of British officials in St. John's. Ogden's observation in July 1800 that Ireland in foment would govern the sentiments and actions of the great majority in Newfoundland was representative. A reinforced and more reliable regiment was proposed, with a reduction in the numbers of overwintering Irish. "The Irish vagabonds should be sent from Newfoundland every fall" Tremlett informed William Adams, M.P. for Dartmouth, only a week after the breakaway from the garrison. If they lacked the fares, then the government should pay the passages home. "What's a few £1000 ... if the safety of Newfoundland can be assured." Ogden basically concurred, advising governor Pole in August that the best strategy

> would be by sending to Ireland as many as possibly can be provided with passages, especially the unmarried. The problem would not have gotten so out of hand had there been sufficient passage vessels to Ireland and had the cost not jumped from £2 to £5 ... very few vessels have sailed for Ireland at the end of the fishing season [1799] in comparison to what formerly did.

A reduction in shipping did occur, largely because through the 1790s fewer and fewer Irish were going home. Even if the fares remained stable few Irish servants would return. The transatlantic migratory fishery was over, and the servants arriving each spring were essentially emigrants.

Continuing fears of a second rising were fueled especially by Skerrett who had a vested interest in doing so. He informed the Secretary of State in September, 1801, that a "vast immigration of dangerous united men from Ireland, to this country, ..." was in progress and must be stopped. The military, moreover, should be reformed.

> a corps of hardy Welshmen would be best for this Newfoundland service. [I] had a regiment of them in Ireland at [the] Battle of Arklow and the Welsh bravery saved the life of every Protestant in Ireland. The Welsh stood their ground when ordered to retreat and 1705 United men were killed.... If it was possible my lord to select a corps without Irishmen or seamen for this service it would be a wise and prudent measure. The sailors all desert and the Irishmen are subject to be seduced. I have a very gallant regiment under my command, but there are too many sailors, Irishmen, and Catholics mingled in their ranks.

The regiment, which had come from Halifax after the April rising, was disbanded following the treaty of Amiens in 1802, and a new fencible corps formed.

Skerrett's claim of continuing United Irish immigration received some support. John Welsford wrote from the garrison in St. John's to Sir George Shee as late as October, 1803, that "a proper military force" was required to defend the island against the French and the Irish.

> ... a great proportion of the inhabitants ... consist for the most part of the lower class of Irish, loose and vagrant people without order or principle and ought to be watched with great precaution ... one mercantile house received this year from Waterford 800 labourers, two-thirds beyond doubt united rebels ... the lower class are as regularly united in this country as in Ireland and ... they have regular communication.

Complaining about the small military force that December, governor Gambier worried that the enemy could have captured St. John's "and the large proportion of Irish among the lower classes of the Inhabitants ... would probably have joined them."[51]

Statistics on the volume of Irish migration to Newfoundland are extensive for most years up to 1790 but are sporadic and incomplete for the final decade of the

century. Comments from various colonial administrators, merchants, and others suggest the numbers arriving dropped dramatically with the collapse of the trans-atlantic migratory fishery and the onset of war. Concern was expressed over labour shortages and high wages. A group of St. John's merchants, for example, petitioned the governor in fall, 1798, that a certain number of "dieters" be allowed to stay the winter. They were needed to prosecute the new seal hunt offshore. In 1802 three merchants trading in Bay Bulls objected to a government order that all unshipped Irish servants be sent home in the fall. They were needed by the planters to work in the woods. Skerrett's talk of a "vast immigration" and Welsford's reported 800 United men recruited by a single merchant house are fallacious. There was no mass exodus from Wexford or adjoining counties following '98, at least not to Newfoundland. Some United men and sympathizers did flee the campaign of terror mounted by the military. Some, as noted, ended up working in the cod fishery. Few, however, would join the regiment in St. John's.

Reports from Wexford suggest that most United men went home and sat out the loyalist reprisals in relative safety. It was an oath-bound secret organization and membership or participation was difficult to prove. The question remains why a group of Irish immigrants should resurrect or continue with the code two years after a crushing defeat in the homeland. Allowing for all the hyperbole and rumour that characterized the commentary outlined here, there is no denying that the mutiny had a link with the United Irish movement. Remnants of the rebel forces, faced with a brutal loyalist backlash, continued to organize and resist crown forces up to the Act of Union, both in Ireland and in England. Ringleaders such as James Murphy acted as agents at home and abroad in a vain attempt to revitalize the movement. Recruitment in St. John's may have been driven by an urge for revenge, a ploy for plunder, or a decoy by a group of soldiers desperate to get out of the army that somehow spun out of control.

The documentation at present tells us more about the mentalité of the military leaders and colonial administration, particularly their perceptions of the Irish poor, than it does about the rebels. There were some military changes following the rising. The Newfoundland Regiment was removed to Halifax, and one in Halifax relocated to St. John's. Neither Pole or Skerrett were satisfied with the composition of the new corps; it, too, was apparently dominated by Catholic Irish. The regiment was disbanded in 1802. Skerrett was given permission to raise a new corps of 1,000 men. By 1805 some of that complement had been enlisted "despite competition from the fishery."

Monetary rewards and promotions for the leading figures involved in containing or suppressing the rising ensued. Ogden was appointed chief justice and, following a stroke, was succeeded by Tremlett who in 1801 had been installed as registrar of the vice-admiralty court. He held the position of resident chief justice until 1813 when, due to accusations of incompetence and general unpopularity, was ordered to exchange places with Caesar Colclough of Prince Edward Island. A

native of Duffry Hall, Co. Wexford, Colclough had quite coincidentally played a leading role as a government informant on the impending rebellion in his native district in 1797 and early 1798. Skerrett's persistent advancement of his role in crushing the "rebellion, mutiny and conspiracy" in St. John's eventually helped earn him the position of major general. Finally, a memorial in 1804 from the "J.Ps, Merchants and Principal Inhabitants of St. John's" to the governor outlined the contribution of O Donel:

> ... particularly in the spring of the year 1799, [sic] when next to General Skerrett he was the person who saved this valuable island from becoming a scene of anarchy and confusion by making the most unwearied exertions and using the extensive influence he had acquired over the lower classes by which means they were prevented from joining the mutineers of the Newfoundland Regiment at a time when General Skerrett had not sufficient force to oppose such a dangerous combination.
>
> This the General with candour often acknowledged, and frequently regretted that he had no sufficient interest at home, to procure Dr. O Donel a pension from Government, for the many essential services he had rendered this country.

"When mutiny and Insurrection, was prowling abroad three years since," Skerrett added, and the standard of Rebellion erected, By Dr. O Donels influence and direction with the people he afforded me every assistance and gave me much information that was going on, which enabled me to frustrate all their diabolical plans & restore the country to peace and good order."[52]

O'Donel did receive £50 a year from the government for his contribution. Both he and Skerrett "my best of friends" left Newfoundland in 1807. With their departure, the turbulent spring of 1800 became a fading memory. Irish immigration did increase dramatically over the next three decades, and with it new stories of '98 became lodged in the island's consciousness and endure to this day in Newfoundland oral tradition.

Ireland's cultural and commercial connections with Newfoundland were unique amongst colonies or regions across the Atlantic in the 18th century. The two islands were intimately bound not only through the annual salt provisions trade from southeast Irish ports, but through a singular pattern of migrations — seasonal, temporary, and permanent — that resulted in a continuing infusion of homeland cultural elements in areas of Irish settlement along the Newfoundland shore. Some of these traits were transformed as the Irish adapted to a novel physical, economic and social geography. Pedley was the first historian to consider the mutiny of 1800 in some detail. He stressed the importance of Irish precedent:

> ... there was conceived, developed, and all but consummated, a conspiracy after the Irish pattern, adapting as its watchword the ancient [Catholic] church, and a bloody triumph over its enemies.

The conspiracy, he suggested, was being hatched for some time and was connected to a flight of Irish refugees to Newfoundland after the failed rebellion there. Few modern scholars have given the space Pedley did to the mutiny, but almost all accept the views of contemporary commentators that it was rooted in the events of '98 and their aftermath.[53]

There is no evidence that the ideology embraced by the United Irish leadership was introduced to Newfoundland. But there is no question either that elements of the code prevalent amongst the rebels in '98 reappeared in St. John's. The language was adapted to local disaffection amongst the Catholic Irish in the garrison, and in the fishery. It did lead to an armed mutiny, tiny when placed beside the Wexford experience, but one that did not occur elsewhere in North America.

United Irishmen, sympathizers, and a greater number who witnessed the confrontation of 1798 settled in different parts of the continent. There is an emerging literature on the political and social careers of the more prominent '98 leaders in exile.[54] Roughly fifty of those who moved to the United States have been profiled. Some arrived before the rising, others as political refugees from the reprisals that followed it. This group differed substantially from the great bulk of Irish in Newfoundland. Most were Protestant, literate, and middle class. They came, in the main, from professional urban backgrounds and continued careers in America in such areas as medicine, law, journalism and politics. In contrast again to the vast majority of Irish in Newfoundland, the "little communities" of exiled United Irish leaders in America were more anglicized, intellectual, and radical. Their political ideology was rooted largely in the republicanism of revolutionary France and they were welcomed by radical political groups and leaders in urban America.

Several thousand ordinary Irish also moved to America annually through the 1790s. Some of these had much in common with the Newfoundland Irish. They were Catholic, largely illiterate, poor, and worked as servants, labourers or as humble artisans. A few of the exiled United Irish leaders defended them against discrimination. Indeed there may have been attempts to enlist them in the radical popular politics of the United States. A riot in Philadelphia in 1799, for example, was interpreted by the authorities as a United Irish plot. But, as Michael Durey has noted, these ordinary Irish had come not in search of a republic, but for bread.

All the evidence suggests a similar background amongst the Irish in Newfoundland. They were not politically active. Newfoundland did not have a legislature, political parties, or elections. This is not to say that the young Irish male migrants and emigrants arriving in Newfoundland harbours in the 1790s were apolitical. Much of the recent literature argues that they were not.[55] Although they could not stand for election, and most did not have the vote, Catholics in Ireland were becoming more and more involved in the political process. To what extent this process had filtered down from the more literate middle class to the disenfranchised Catholic poor in southeast Ireland is a question that requires more study. There were factions and combinations protesting social and economic grievances,

there were food riots, agitation over tithes, conflicts over enclosing the commons, and several other manifestations of disaffection. Almost all, however, were local and sporadic. Caesar Colclough made a subtle but significant distinction between secret oaths taken in north county Waterford in 1798, and those in his native district in northwest Wexford. One was related to agrarian discontent, the other to join the United Irishmen. Almost two decades later Colclough was equally discerning about the nature of Irish disturbances in St. John's. They reflected factions from homeland localities competing for work or social distinction, or protesting more general economic grievances.[56]

In contrast to Caesar Colclough, English observers usually saw Irish disaffection in religious and political terms. The rising in 1800 was a revitalization of 1798, "spurred on," as Tremlett argued, by the proposed union of Great Britain and Ireland. Tremlett linked the oath-bound United Irish in Newfoundland in 1800 directly to French revolutionary doctrine. He was not alone in suggesting a radicalized element in St. John's was a cause for concern. Noting continuing disaffection in the town, Waldegrave warned that of all British colonies Newfoundland seemed the most likely to push for "liberty and equality." His departure coincided with the arrival from England in 1799 of Lewis Anspach, an Anglican priest who was appointed headmaster of a grammar school in St. John's. A serious historian, Anspach maintained that St. John's was then a hotbed of revolution, with the pamphlets of Thomas Paine circulating through the town.[57] No explicit connection with the disadvantaged Irish was made, although most references to disaffection focused on them. In contrast to Anspach, Pedley wrote his history at a time when society was deeply divided along sectarian lines, and his interpretation of both 1798 and 1800 reflected the folklore that had evolved. Pedley presented '98 as an alliance of rebels and the Catholic church trying to break free of British rule and Protestant ascendancy. The conspiracy in Newfoundland was, he argued, closely connected but with a strange mix, combining a devotion to Catholicism and the doctrine of the "infidel" Thomas Paine.[58]

ODonel conceded Catholic complicity and radical republicanism in '98, but not in Newfoundland. And, although the promise of Catholic emancipation with the proposed union was unlikely in the aftermath of '98, he followed the policy of the Irish hierarchy, and supported it.

> The legislative union of England and Ireland will be productive of great service to the Catholics; the ex ministers had it in contemplation to join a handsom state Provision for the Catholick clergy with the Catholick Emancipation, both measures are dropt for a time, but will [be] ultimately and perhaps speedily effected.

Emancipation did come, though not as speedily as O Donel hoped. It was followed by the granting to Newfoundland of a legislature in 1832. With it came elections and the emergence of a politicized society deeply divided along Catholic Irish-Prot-

estant English lines. The roots of this cleavage lay deep in the Newfoundland past, and the rising of 1800 was one of the most dramatic events in this long and complex relationship.

Notes

[1]L'abbé A. Gosselin ed., *Les Normands au Canada*. (Évereux, 1900), 54-63.

[2]Letter Book of captain Michael Richards, 1700-1703, Stowe ms. 464: 129, 134, 146, 150-157, 216. Maritime History Archives (MHA), Memorial University of Newfoundland.

[3]Colonial Office (CO) 194/2 (1700), 26-29, 90; / 3 (1704), 162; / 4 (1707), 164, 175-182. Although he quarreled with the military leadership in St. John's, Benger's political allegiance could hardly be in doubt. His wife Mary, also from Ireland, suffered severely at the hands of the French. Her first husband, Sir David Kirke, formerly of Ferryland, died while the family was held prisoner at Placentia. Mary and her children came to St. John's and she married James Benger in 1698. Colonial office records, Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) Memorial University.

[4]CO 194/3 (1705), 306.

[5]CO 194/4 (1709), 399.

[6]Gerald S. Graham, ed., *The Walker Expedition to Quebec, 1711*. Journal, Champlain Society Publications, 32 (New York, 1969), 241.

[7]CO 194/7 (1720), 7.

[8]CO 194/25 (1749), 78.

[9]D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland*. (London, 1895, reprinted Belleville, 1972), 294. The Catholic Irish accounted for 60% of the population in 1753, 57% (1754) and 49% (1758). C.O. 194/13 (1753), 116-123; (1754), 152; /14 (1758), 7-8. Most were male servants, but there was a substantial number of propertied Irish in the town.

[10]Prowse, 308, 415-416; *Belfast News Letter*, July 31, 1762. Osborne Greatrakes of Youghal, captain of a Bristol privateer, reported that there were three ships from Waterford in St. John's harbour, and "more than 100 Whiteboys."

[11]Griffith Williams, *An Account of the Island of Newfoundland, with the Nature of its Trade, and the Method of Carrying on the Fishery*. (London, 1765), 10.

[12]GN2/1/A/3 (1762),164. Government of Newfoundland records, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL), St. John's.

[13]ADM1/482 (Aug. 16, 1762). British Admiralty records, MHA.

[14]CO 194/39 (1796), 19-25, 70-73.

[15]CO 194/38 (1789), 125. Of the 836 residents recorded in the district, 80% were Irish.

[16]W. Benjamin Kennedy, "The United Irishmen and the Great Naval Mutiny of 1797." *Éire-Ireland* 25:3 (1990), 3-7. Details on the United Irish rebellion are outlined below.

[17]GN 2/1/A/14 (1798), 367, 371, (1799), 329, 331. David A. Webber, *Skinner's Fencibles: The Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 1795-1802*. (St. John's, 1964), 24, 30, 32.

[18]CO 194/39 (1797), 94; ADM1/473 (1797), 405-406, 418; GN2/1/A/13 (1797), 21, 255.

[19]GN2/A/1/13 (1797), 134; CO 194/40 (1798), 29.

[20]CO 194/40 (1798), 93; GN2/1/A/14 (1798), 250.

[21]CO 194/39 (1795), 3, /40 (1797), 5, /43 (1801), 32, (1802), 121; GN1/13 (1795). The Irish component was: 56% (1795), 59% (1797), 43% (1801 and 1802). The latter percentage is probably more accurate for the island.

[22]Kevin Whelan, "The religious factor in the 1798 rebellion in county Wexford." In Patrick O'Flanagan et al., eds. *Rural Ireland 1600-1900: Modernisation and Change*. (Cork, 1987), 62-85; L.M. Cullen. "The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford: United Irishman organization, membership, leadership." In Kevin Whelan, ed., *Wexford: History and Society*. (Dublin, 1987), 248-295; Sean Cloney. "South-West Wexford in 1798." *Wexford Historical Society Journal* 15 (1994-1995), 74-95; Richard Musgrave. *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland, from the arrival of the English; also a particular detail of that which broke out on the 23d of May, 1798, with the history of the conspiracy which preceded it.* Steven W. Myers and Delores E. McKnight, eds. (Fort Wayne, IN., 1995). Musgrave's account, updated by Cloney, does, however, show considerable activity in the region.

[23]Data on Irish-Newfoundland shipping in 1798 come from *Lloyd's List*; Admiralty 7/143, Plantation Passes; *Finn's Leinster Journal*; *Farley's Bristol Journal* (MHA). See also King Elmes, "The Elmes Letters" *The Past* 17 (1990), 55-70.

[24]GN2/1/A/15 (1799), 322.

[25]G.W.L. Nicholson, "John Skerrett", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, V (Toronto, 1983), 761-762.

[26]Daniel Gahan, *The People's Rising: Wexford, 1798*. (Dublin, 1995), 152-156; Musgrave's *Memoirs*, 409-413.

[27]CO 194/43 (1801), 189; War Office (hereafter, WO) 1/18 (1800), 196. (War office records, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa).

[28]The main communications in 1800 were: Skerrett to Kent, April 30, May 10, 12; Tremlett Jr. to Tremlett Sr., April 30, to Adams, April 30, to Lamb, May 2; Kent to Dundas, May 24; Portland to Pole, July 1; Routh to Portland, Aug. 15; Pole to Lords of Trade, Oct. 25; Skerrett to Secretary of State, Sept. 22, 1801; Welsford to Shee, Oct. 15, Gambier to Secretary of State, Dec. 12, 1803; Gower's Observations, 1804; Skerrett to Secretary of State, May 28, 1805, December 21, 1806. CO 194/42 (1800), 167-169, 213, 305-319, /43 (1801), 189, (1803), 315, /44 (1804), 20, /44 (1805), 298; /45 (1806), 20, 209; Pole Papers, 1799-1801, MG 205 (PANL), Cyril J. Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops and Faction Fighters*. (St. John's, 1984), 153-155.

[29]CO 194/42, Dec. 18, 1799.

[30]WO 1/15 (1794), 172; CO 194/39 (1796), 70-73.

[31]Webber, 67-68.

[32]Charles Pedley, *The History of Newfoundland from the Earliest Times to the Year 1860*. (London, 1863), 210-215. Skerrett also pardoned McDonald "because I have received very important information from him which corresponds with the evidence of another man." WO 1/18 (1800), 193-197.

[33]There was no family called Baker in Bay Bulls at this time, as far as we know. Skerrett is likely referring to the Armstrongs a long established family of English planter origins in Bay Bulls. William Armstrong (1748-1836) was deputy sheriff in Bay Bulls in the 1780s, and then appointed Marshall of the Supreme Court in St. John's. He was also a sergeant-major, first in the volunteers, then in the regiment. His wife Johanna Cunningham (1762-1839) was Catholic Irish. ADM 1/473 (Aug. 8, 1797); GN/2/A/1/14 (1798), 340; Roman Catholic registers, baptisms. St. John's, Jan. 11, 1808; Registry of wills, administration, Jan.

27, 1839, April 14, 17, 1840; *The Patriot*, Aug. 13, 1836; *The Newfoundlander*, Jan. 23, 1840 (PANL). Significantly, William's son, William, a resident of St. John's, married Bridget Whalen of New Ross in New Ross in February, 1800 (Roman Catholic Register of Marriages, New Ross, 8 February 1800. MHA). They were important sources of information on both the Wexford rebellion and the garrison mutiny.

[34]John Mannion "A Transatlantic Merchant Fishery: Richard Welsh of New Ross and the Sweetmans of Newbawn in Newfoundland, 1734-1862" in Whelan, ed., *Wexford*, 373-421.

[35]GN2/1/A/15 (1799), 339, 409. "Captain Haly, the major of Brigade, late of the 5th Regt of the Irish Brigade, with great spirit and exertion took a most dangerous fellow yesterday concealed in the loft of the R.C. chapel. There is another lurking in St. John's protected by his brethern United fellows. The traitors were to have been aided by the United men in St. John's". Skerrett to Kent, April 30.

[36]GN1/13 (1795), Nominal census of St. John's. See John Mannion "St. John's" Plate 27, *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Vol. 1, R. Cole Harris, ed. (Toronto, 1987).

[37]Raymond J. Lahey, *James Louis O'Donel in Newfoundland 1784-1807*. (St. John's, 1984).

[38]Byrne, 40, O Donel to Talbot, Jan. 4, 1784.

[39]Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690-1830*. (Dublin, 1992); 84.

[40]Lahey, 25. For an analysis of the Irish Catholic hierarchy's policy on revolutionary France see Dáire Keogh *"The French Disease": The Catholic Church and Radicalism in Ireland, 1790-1800*. (Dublin, 1993). The phrase was coined by Dr. Hussey, bishop of Waterford, one of O Donel's correspondents. See also Kevin Whelan, "The role of the Catholic priest in the 1798 rebellion in county Wexford." In *Wexford*, 296-315.

[41]Myers and McKnight. *Musgrave Memoirs*, 464. O Donel's only recorded criticism of loyalist atrocities was a reference to the burning of the chapel in Enniscorthy.

[42]Lahey, 28.

[43]GN2/1/A/17 (1804), 336.

[44]CO 194/44 (1804), 336.

[45]CO 194/42 (1800), 169.

[46]Byrne, 171-172.

[47]WO 1/15 (1794), 147. Two Irishmen were executed for this crime, and a third suspect escaped.

[48]CO 194/41 (1795), 124.

[49]Keogh, *"The French Disease,"* 105. Thomas Hussey, the bishop of Waterford, although loyal, was not afraid to condemn the military authorities over religious discrimination. The situation was highlighted in 1795 when a Catholic private in Carrick-on-Suir refused to attend Protestant services on the advice of his confessor, and was flogged. For an analysis of the Irish yeomanry see Allan Blackstock, *The Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry 1796-1834*. (Dublin, 1998).

[50]Thomas Bartlett. "Indiscipline and Disaffection in the armed forces in Ireland in the 1790s." In Patrick J. Corish, ed., *Radicals, Rebels, and Establishments*. (Belfast, 1985), 115-134; Myers and McKnight. *Musgrave Memoirs*, 649-50.

[51]GN 2/1/A/17 (1803), 234.

[52]GN 2/1/A/17 (1804), 336; /18 (1804), 32, 89; (1805), 195, 206. CO 194/44 (1805), 298. The memorial was signed by 13 residents, all of whom ODonel noted, correctly, were "magistrates and Protestant merchants."

[53]Pedley, *History*, 210-215. Most modern historians and others writing on political developments in Newfoundland around the turn of the century refer to the conspiracy. The most detailed accounts are in G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Fighting Newfoundlander: A History of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.* (London, 1964), 27, 41-46; Webber, 67-68; Paul O'Neill, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland*, Vol. 1 (Ontario, 1975), 100-103; Cyril J. Byrne, "The United Irish Rising of 1798 and the Fencibles' Mutiny in St. John's, 1800." *An NASC* 11 (1998), 15-24; Lahey, 25-28; and Aidan O'Hara, 'The entire island is United ...' The attempted United Irish rising in Newfoundland, 1800." *History Ireland* 8:1 (2000): 18-21.

[54]Richard J. Twomey. "Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radical Ideology, 1790-1810." In Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, eds. *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism.* (London, 1984), 284-299; Michael Durey. "Transatlantic Patriotism: Political Exiles and America in the Age of Revolution." In Clive Emsley and James Walvin, eds. *Artisans, Peasants and Proletarians, 1760-1800.* (London, 1985), 1-12; Emsley and Walvin. "Irish Deism and Jefferson's Republic: Denis Driscoll in Ireland and America, 1793-1810." *Éire-Ireland* 25:4 (1990), 56-76; Martin Burke. "Piecing together a shattered past: The Historical Writings of the United Irish Exiles in America." In David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, eds. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion.* (Dublin, 1993), 297-312; David Wilson. "William Cobbett and the Language of Sectarianism: The Philadelphia Irish during the French Revolution." In Cecil J. Houston and Joseph Leydon, eds. *Ireland: The Haunted Arc.* (Toronto, 1996), 39-51; David Wilson. *United Irishmen, United States, Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic.* (Dublin, 1998).

[55]Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the late Eighteenth Century.* (London, 1992). See also Corish, ed. (1985) and Dickson et al., eds. (1993).

[56]Cullen, *Wexford*, (1987), 254; CO 194/55 (1814), 227; / 56 (1815), 173, 211; / 58 (1816), 183.

[57]L.A. Anspach. *History of the Island of Newfoundland.* (London, 1819), 228.

[58]Pedley, 209-210. The debate over 1800 had entered the sectarian politics of Newfoundland well before Pedley arrived. Henry Winton for example, printed an account of the Sunday plot as related by Tremlett and Skerrett in the Protestant *Public Ledger*. It was strongly denied by the Catholic *Patriot*, whose editor followed O Donel's line that there was no plan to assassinate Anglicans at church, and that the mutiny was confined to the garrison. Howley's brief reference to the affair avoids any reference to Irishmen or Catholics. *Public Ledger*, July 9, 1839; M.F. Howley. *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland.* (Boston, 1888), 194.