

*Commonwealth* should further appeal to a broader audience of scholars of immigration and transnational history, while lay readers—especially those interested in Texas political history—will find it a rich and rewarding experience.

## Musician on Patrol: How Chicago's Chief of Police Saved Irish Music

**O'Malley, Michael. *The Beat Cop: Chicago's Chief O'Neill and the Creation of Irish Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. 350 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0226818702.**

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Michael O'Malley's *The Beat Cop* traces the journey of Francis O'Neill, an Irish immigrant who rose to the top of Chicago's police department while cultivating a passion for Irish music. Equal parts biography, historical synthesis, and cultural commentary, *The Beat Cop* positions Chief O'Neill at the crossroads of multiple modernizations in police work and information-gathering within the rough-and-tumble urban landscape of late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. All the while, O'Neill, profoundly nostalgic for his Irish homeland, preserved for the American public authentic Irish music through data collection and publication. But O'Neill was steeped in the murky waters of imperialism: O'Malley convincingly demonstrates that O'Neill viewed Irish music as a kind of natural resource to be mined in Chicago and elsewhere for the benefit of Ireland. This allowed O'Neill "to be both eminently Irish and eminently American" (5).

O'Malley's first chapter recounts the early life of O'Neill, who was born during the famine in 1848. His family was able to lease a sizable portion of land and therefore fared better than many others in Ireland. O'Malley reminds readers that the O'Neills were "strong farmers" who were able to live above the subsistence level, rendering them, in O'Malley's words, as "colonialism's middlemen" (16). Francis attended a National School where his education was infused with a colonized mindset: imperial-oriented instruction fostered O'Neill's rejection of nationalism through physical force. "He seized on music as a sign of Irish national character," O'Malley writes (26). O'Malley questions O'Neill's own idealized assertions about his childhood and Irish society more broadly given in books and interviews published later in his life. What is certain, however, is that Irish music played a key role in O'Neill's upbringing.

By O'Neill's seventeenth birthday, restlessness and the allure of the sea and distant lands led to his departure. He would not return home for forty years. O'Malley's second chapter focuses on O'Neill's brief career as a sailor. He traveled to Egypt, the Pacific, and

ultimately, the United States. O'Neill was briefly shipwrecked on Baker Island: his flute-playing skills earned him extra rations aboard the rescue ship. O'Neill was exposed to numerous peoples, preparing him to work with Chicago's diverse population as chief of the Chicago Police Department. O'Neill settled in the United States. He worked as a manual laborer in Erie, Pennsylvania, and as a teacher in Edina, Missouri. In Edina, O'Neill participated in a robust music scene that included French, German, and Irish immigrants as well as native Kentuckians. In 1870, he married and moved to Chicago, finding work as a meatpacker, a railroad clerk, a dry goods retailer, and ultimately, by 1873, a city patrolman. He became a US citizen that same year.

O'Malley demonstrates the role of boss politics in O'Neill's advancement within the Chicago Police Department. O'Neill's time as a police officer coincided with Gilded Age civil service reforms, and although his early hiring date granted him exemptions, he nevertheless took the required exams, scoring well enough to demonstrate "his merit, not just his capacity to make friends" (126). But O'Neill also made friends. He forged relationships with powerful urban constituencies. During the Pullman Strike in 1894, O'Neill sided with the railroad companies. He labeled a saloonkeeper an anarchist as pretext to clear the establishment out. These examples align with O'Malley's larger assertions that Chief O'Neill valued order and recognized that placating Chicago's corporate community, increasingly through modern policing techniques, meant greater professional and financial stability for his family.

O'Malley's last three chapters connect O'Neill's policework to his passion for accumulating and organizing Irish music. O'Malley intertwines the experiences of Chicago's Irish American community with broader contemporary perceptions of nationalism, politics, and pop culture. By the time O'Neill became General Superintendent in 1901, he "turned the authority of his office toward his music collecting, using the techniques of modern police work to collect and catalog the music Chicago's Irish immigrants played" (191). The chief's obsessive quest to gather information related to Irish music, which even included the use of undercover police officers, paralleled his law and order approach to urban life. As O'Malley puts it, "O'Neill imposed a new kind of order on the music of those milkmaids, plowmen, and spinners he praised in memory, now working as laborers and domestics and firemen in Chicago or eking out livings playing house dances. He would save their music by taking it out of their context, the context of living community, and writing it down in his book" (217). O'Neill redoubled his efforts during his retirement from the police force, compulsively gathering information on and writing about Irish music. O'Neill's work was not published without contemporary criticism. O'Neill lacked training in musical theory and some critics excoriated him for transcribing what appeared in multiple books.

*The Beat Cop* will be of interest to scholars of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era who have an interest in Irish American culture and the history of urban immigrant communities. O'Malley offers illustrative background information in each chapter and the text includes thirty-five black-and-white images, many from Chicago-based newspapers. Although no bibliography is included, there is a robust notes section for each chapter and a helpful index.