The Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter

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Edited by Ryan Keating (California State University, San Bernardino)
And Digital Assistant Editor Bryan Zehngut-Willits (New York University)

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Greetings from the Editor

I hope that everyone had a productive past six months and a safe and happy new year. As we move into 2023, I hope to continue to utilize the IEHS Newsletter to highlight new and exciting scholarship and ongoing public history projects, keep readers updated on ongoing IEHS activities and events, and celebrate the many successes of our members. Below, you will find two engaged pieces by outstanding scholars which showcase the dynamic and diverse research currently ongoing in the field. In “Migration, Racialized Medicine, and Abortion in the Borderlands,” Dr. Alicia Gutierrez-Romine shares with us the struggles of immigrants in the southwestern borderlands in their quest to find equitable medical care in an era when abortion was criminalized. Her piece, and her broader research, provides important historical context as we ponder the impact and ramifications of the recent Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade. In this edition’s Public History Spotlight, historian Damian Shiels shares with us his experiences over the past twelve years telling the stories of Irish immigrants in 19th Century and his efforts to share with the world the experiences of men and women long forgotten within the historical narrative. I believe that you will find both pieces fascinating.

As we look forward to the spring, I wanted to draw your attention to the upcoming meeting of the Organization of American Historians, which will take place from March 30-April 2 in Los Angeles, California. The Immigration and Ethnic History Society will meet during that conference, and herein you will find a list of IEHS sponsored events that will be held at that conference.

I would also like to welcome two new student editors who are assisting me in the production of this newsletter. Xavier Resendez is a Mellon Mays Fellow and first-year PhD student at the University of California, Riverside, where he studying the codification of race-based laws in the Southwestern Borderlands during the 19th century. Viviana Alvarez is also a Mellon Mays Fellow and a senior at California State University, San Bernardino who currently researches youth movements in Latin America during the 1950s. Both are exceptional young historians and welcome additions to the team. I also wanted to draw your attention to the hard work of Bryan Zehngut-Willits, whose technical expertise and support is vital to the success of this piece.
Finally, I would like to encourage readers to share with us any exciting news so that we might celebrate your achievements publicly. Visit this link to let us know about your successes!

Viviana Alvarez, Mellon Mays Fellow and a senior at California State University, San Bernardino
In 1961, a woman (known only as Mrs. Miller) drove her daughter, Nancy, from Riverside, California to the border town of Tijuana, Mexico. This was not a nice mother-daughter day trip for shopping, culture, food, or entertainment. No.
Nancy had become pregnant by a "goon," while her fiancé—"a promising young man"—was away at college. Fearing for her daughter’s marriage prospects, Mrs. Miller contacted her family doctor and a series of friends and acquaintances to see if any of them could offer any advice on how to get her daughter an abortion.

These efforts, however, were all for naught. In her desperation, Mrs. Miller decided that they would just drive down to Mexicali and find someone to take care of the job. As Mrs. Miller and her daughter searched in desperation for an abortionist in Mexicali, they finally got a lead. The women were directed to wait at a coffee shop in Tijuana the next day. Someone from the doctor’s office would come and get them. [1]

In the 1950s and 1960s, “Tijuana Abortions” were not uncommon. The phenomenon existed in the cultural mainstream, and perhaps was a legacy or byproduct of Americans’ unique relationship with towns along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Beginning in the early 20th century, something unique happened along the national border. On one hand, cable cars, automobiles, and Progressive-era vice reform made Americans’ travel to and across the border simpler and, perhaps, more desirable; and these border town catered to American vice
tourism by providing opportunities for Americans to imbibe or gamble.[2] On the other hand, this same period saw the hardening of that national border.[3]

While border crossing had been relatively unregulated before, typhus outbreaks and public health concerns, the eugenics movement, and racialized ideas about vice and crime manifested into border patrol practices and policies. For example, when typhus broke out in a railroad workers’ camp in Palmdale, California, the Mexican community bore the brunt of public health officials’ regulations. Mexican and Mexican American workers resisted the racialized portrayal of typhus and the humiliating anti-typhus policies that required bathing with disinfectants.

A group of Mexican workers in Joshua Tree, California, for example wrote the Mexican Consul in Los Angeles and explained the crude, unfair, and racist regulations. They closed their letter stating: “no es la raza Mexicana diferente de la Americana para que se crea que solo en nuestro cuerpo se reconcentran las enfermedades. Todos somos humanos y no deberian aplicar este procedimiento únicamente a los Mexicanos.”[4] Roughly translated in English, the men wrote: “the Mexican race is not so different from the American race such as to assume that diseases are concentrated only in our bodies. We are all human and these procedures should not be limited or applied only to Mexicans.”

The increased scrutiny over Mexican bodies boiled over into the Bath Riots of 1917 when a young teenage woman convinced a group of Mexicans crossing the border from Juarez, Mexico into El Paso, Texas to refuse to undergo the typhus screening (which required that border crossers undress and take showers with chemical disinfectants at least once every week). The riot continued through the next day but was eventually quelled with no change to
the existing policies. In fact, these policies regarding cleaning and bathing would continue for decades.

However, this new surveillance and restriction was one-sided. While the nascent border patrol focused its attention on illegal immigration and regulating the movements of Mexicans and others moving north, very little attention was paid to Americans who crossed the border into Mexico. In fact, as the ability to move across the border became harder for Mexicans traveling north, the process essentially became easier for Americans traveling south.

As the vice industry on the border emerged and catered to Americans debauch desires for drink, sex, and fun, abortion became one part of that industry, too. Documents in the California State Archives show proof as early as the 1920s and 1930s of investigations into American women crossing the border into Mexico in pursuit of abortions. Ironically, abortion was illegal in Mexico, too; however, in the no holds barred zone at the border, there was little room for regulation or enforcement. As Mary L. Dudziak and Let Volpp stated, “in borderland spaces, we can see what law does in American history and American culture… Law does not respond to natural forces outside the law; instead, it responds to a social context constructed, in part, through law.” Law then produces categories (of legal or illegal) and other phenomenon we might assume to be natural (like the transnational labor market), or, in this case, the illicit abortion industry in the tolerant border zone.[5]

When Mrs. Miller and her daughter waited at that coffee shop in Tijuana, they were eventually met by a young man who was about 6 feet tall with blue eyes, a medium build, and reddish orange hair. The young man instructed Mrs. Miller and her daughter to get in their vehicle with him. He provided directions as Mrs. Miller drove, and they ultimately ended up at a white stucco building. Fortunately for Mrs. Miller and Nancy, this office belonged to Dr. Alfonso Paris. Dr. Paris was a Mexican physician in his early thirties with black hair and hazel eyes. Another American woman who went to him for an illegal abortion described him (and his dimples) as “cute.” Among law enforcement officials and the California Board of Medical Examiners, Dr. Paris was well known and regarded as highly educated and proficient. His surgical instruments were clean, and his office was “well equipped” and “smelled of disinfectants.” He even gave Nancy a sedative before the procedure and an antibiotic after.

Mrs. Miller paid $350 for her daughter’s abortion, and as they were leaving, the women were instructed “to sit up and act gay” when they drove across the border to give the appearance that they had just come to Mexico to have a good time—thus blending in with the dozens or hundreds of Americans who did the same every day.

The description of Nancy’s abortion, and of Dr. Paris office and treatment, might be surprising to you. While Dr. Paris offered hygienic—albeit illicit—medical
care to Nancy, his sterile office and Nancy's complication-free procedure do not fit our common conception of illicit abortions or “Tijuana abortions.” In the 1960s, as more women began to take advantage of options for abortion upon demand in Mexican border towns, there were upticks in cases requiring emergency medical care at the Los Angeles County General Hospital. Physicians there, too, believed that border abortions were responsible.[6]
Previously articulated beliefs about Mexican cleanliness and disease arguably painted Americans’ perceptions of Tijuana abortions. In looking at the legal case that decriminalized abortion in California, *People v. Belous* (1969), the border looms quite large. Fearing she would turn to “butchery” in Tijuana, Dr. Leon Belous referred a young woman to an illegal abortionist in San Diego.

In the eyes of American physicians—and ultimately the California judges who found the abortion statute void for vagueness— notions of savagery and civilization, cleanliness and filth, health and illness mapped neatly along national boundaries and borders. However, as American women crossed those borders—first for their procedure, and then again to return home—their migration made clear the effects of abortion restrictions. Their migration laid bare the sometimes-ill-fated pursuit of illegal abortion, and brought to the American imagination the idea that Mexican abortions were dangerous, but American ones were safe.

As we ponder the effects of recent Supreme Court rulings and state-level legislation on abortion, migration will be an important aspect of that discussion. Courts and law enforcement grappled with border crossing for abortion then. As our world is smaller and more connected today, we can assume those same legal issues and regulations will emerge again. As some states move to restrict abortion, other states (or countries) may become abortion-tourism destinations. However, we must also consider those who will lack the resources to travel cross-country or across national lines. Ultimately in this context, migration would be a privilege not afforded to all.
Alicia Gutierrez-Romine is an Associate Professor of History at La Sierra University. She is the author of *From Back Alley to the Border: Criminal Abortion in California, 1920-1969* (University of Nebraska Press, 2020), and appears in *Beyond the Borders of the Law: Critical Legal Histories of the North American West* (University Press of Kansas, 2018). Her research explores intersections of race, sex, gender, and professional medicine in California and the borderlands.

**NOTES:**


From the IEHS President

As I approach the half-way point in my three-year term as President of the IEHS, I continue to reflect on the extraordinary work our members do to make the Society such a dynamic, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant forum for historians of immigration.

The IEHS is an all-volunteer organization based on our shared commitment to a field of vital importance to American history and society. While every member plays a role, I want to take this opportunity to salute the efforts of those with whom I have worked most closely in recent months.

Alison Efford chaired a committee this year to boost IEHS membership, offer free and discounted rates by category, and iron out a few long-standing technical glitches. The goal is to make it easier to join the Society and easier to stay a member, while also highlighting the advantages of being a part of our community.

Emerging from this initiative, Leigh Ann Wilson and Hana Murayama designed and implemented a new IEHS Mentoring Program. We hope that this program...
will help foster a sense of community and support mentees as they navigate a changing higher education landscape.

Andy Urban, a member of our Program Committee, chaired a committee on digital initiatives that has a number of innovative projects underway. The committee hired Miguel Giron as editor of our online blog Not From Here. Feel free to reach out to Miguel if you are interested in contributing. In conjunction with these digital initiatives, Ryan Keating has completed the process of moving the IEHS newsletter to an all-digital platform, Sergio Gonzalez is handling our social media, and Bryan Willits continues to manage our new communications infrastructure.

The IEHS Online Book Series, organized by the Program Committee under the leadership of IEHS President Elect Maddalena Marinari, is now hosting three events annually, archived on our YouTube channel.

The Professional Environment Committee, chaired by Maddalena Marinari, continues to implement our Policy on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct at all IEHS-sponsored events.

Thank you, also, to the members of the Nominating Committee, chaired by Rosina Lozano, for putting together the slate for the 2022 elections, with three positions on the Executive Board to be filled; and to the chairs and members of our various Awards committees – Saloutos, First Book, Pozzetta, Dissertation, and Travel, and Qualey – who are busily considering this year’s submissions.

And, to save the most exciting news for last: on Friday, March 31 we plan to host our first IEHS Banquet for three years, directly following our annual meeting at OAH 2023 (pandemic restrictions permitting). Thank you to Natalia Molina and Jane Hong for helping us find a restaurant.

We look forward to seeing you in Los Angeles!

Kevin Kenny
NYU

The IEHS at the OAH

The Immigration and Ethnic History Society is hosting the following sessions, workshops, and seminars at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, which will be held from March 30-April 2, 2023 in Los Angeles, California. For information regarding the meeting of the OAH,
including events, travel, and other opportunities, please visit the organization’s website.

OAH, Los Angeles, April 2023: Solicited Sessions

1. New Directions in Middle Eastern and South Asian Immigration Histories
2. Community Organizing Across Borders: How Local Advocates and Officials Aided and Policed Latinx Migrants during Twentieth-Century Moments of “Crisis”
3. New Directions in Haitian Immigration History
4. Climate Change, Refuge, and Migration Policy in the Americas: A Roundtable on María Cristina García’s *State of Disaster*

OAH, Los Angeles, April 2023: Workshop

- Teaching Migration and Ethnic History: Content, Audiences, and Creative Pedagogies
- **Workshop leaders:** Natalie Mendoza and Andrew Urban
- **Workshop description:** “Teaching Migration and Ethnic History” is a two-hour pedagogy workshop organized into three parts: an introduction to creative pedagogies for teaching migration and ethnic history; breakout sessions for workshopping these pedagogies into existing curriculum; and an open discussion exploring what it means to teach migrant and ethnic history.

OAH, Los Angeles, April 2023: Chat Seminar

- Working with legal advocates and activists
- Torrie Hester and Andrew Urban

OAH, Los Angeles, April 2023: Lighting round

The first IEHS Lightning Round features Katie Carper, Hannah Zaves-Greene, Matthew Guariglia, Janna Haider, Samuel Klee, Carie Rael with Maddalena Marinari and Anna Law chairing. The purpose of this session is for presenters to give an elevator pitch of their research topic and engage with the audience. The IEHS program committee intentionally chose to highlight the work of emerging scholars in this session in the hopes that the roundtable is an opportunity for community building among the presenters and with scholars in the audience.

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News and Noteworthy

Hidetaka Hirota accepted a new position as associate professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley.

Natalia Molina’s book *A Place at the Nayarit: How a Mexican Restaurant Nourished a Community* was published by University of California Press.

We love to celebrate your successes, so please share with us any achievements using this form!

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Public History Spotlight

Telling the Immigrant Story Online- From Irish in the American Civil War Website to Civil War Bluejackets

Damian Shiels

My journey into the world of immigrant public history began one quiet weekend back in May 2010, when I established the Irish American Civil War website. I little realised at that juncture where it

My dedicated interest in the Irish of the American Civil War grew out of my time as a curator at the National Museum of Ireland in the early 2000s, where we were preparing the “Soldiers & Chiefs” Military History
would lead. In the 12 years since, what started life as a hobby blog aimed at sharing stories of the Irish in the conflict has morphed into the largest online repository of information and articles on the Irish experience of the Civil War, with well in excess of 1 million words of text, more than 700 articles, and dozens of resource pages. To date it has been visited more than 1.2 million times, and in 2020 it was added to the National Library of Ireland Web Archive, which seeks to preserve culturally significant Irish websites.

Exhibition, which aimed to tell the Irish military story at home and abroad from 1550 to the present day (it remains on display at the National Museum, Collins Barracks, Dublin). As we researched the American gallery, I was struck by just how little awareness there was in Ireland of the huge impact the Civil War had on people of Irish descent, which in conflict terms is only matched for scale in modern Irish history by the First World War. It was in an effort to contribute towards addressing this that the website was first formed.

Creating and maintaining online public history projects such as *Irish in the American Civil War* are challenging—often extremely so—but when sustained over a significant period of time they have the potential to be highly rewarding, often on multiple levels. For example, the wider public history project that the initial blog began led to the production of two books, aimed primarily at popular audiences, *The Irish in the American Civil War* (History Press, 2014) and *The

With *Irish in the American Civil War*, the site’s move into an increasingly research-focused sphere arose from the desire to develop new techniques for engaging the online public with Irish immigrant history, something that is a constant and necessary process in the fast-evolving digital world. Considering how best to contend with this eventually led [www.irishamericancivilwar.com](http://www.irishamericancivilwar.com) to become more and more engaged with knowledge creation and
Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experience in America (History Press, 2016). This together with outputs such as a sustained programme of annual locally-focused public talks, contributions to Irish edited volumes, newspaper articles, and podcasts and radio segments have contributed—together with the work of other scholars—to achieving the site’s initial aim of raising awareness within Ireland on the Civil War’s impact on Irish immigrants.

Public-focused history projects can do more than just raise public-awareness or interest in a specific topic. They also have the potential to make scholarly contributions of their own, regardless of the fact that this remains a point of contention in some scholarly circles.

Knowledge visualisation. A number of discrete projects arose as a result, such as “Widows in the Atlantic World” which researches and maps the global impact of the American Civil War on ordinary people through widows and dependent pension files (see the IEHS blog); “Mapping Veterans”, a pilot which focuses on Co. Donegal to plot the impact of the Civil War on one Irish county; and The Andersonville Irish Project, which seeks to identify Irish Americans who perished at Andersonville and employ them as a vehicle for exploring the wider Irish immigrant experience.

Each of these projects combines original research and writing with tools such as interactive mapping, StoryMaps, and other data visualisations such as Infographics to achieve their goals. The site has also increasingly engaged the public directly in knowledge creation, one of the most fruitful forms of public history engagement. For example, the Andersonville Irish Project and Mapping Veterans Project both receive public submissions for additions to the databases, which are regularly updated and made available online.
While public and academic history are all too often viewed as entirely separate (and sometimes incompatible) entities, public history projects do have the capacity to bridge the gap between public history, genealogical research/resources and scholarly analysis, particularly in an online setting. In the case of the *Irish in the American Civil War*, its most

*Civil War Bluejackets* is a three-year research project funded by the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council and is a collaboration between historians at the Northumbria University (including the Principal Investigator, Professor David Gleeson), information scientists at the University of Sheffield and the University of Koblenz-Landau, and partners including the United States
significant scholarly contribution arose directly from the fact that it rests outside the academy, and as a result has for the majority of its existence enjoyed limited access to scholarly databases and to financial assistance for traditional historical research trips. In an effort to conduct meaningful original research, the site had to turn instead to the growing body of digitised materials that were being made available for genealogists—particularly through subscription sites like Ancestry, Fold3, and others. Although exploitation of this material is now growing apace within the academia, they remain underutilised—and indeed many universities still do not supply institutional access to them. It was at Fold3 that what has become the most important resource for the scholarly work undertaken on the website was accessed—the widows and dependent pension files of American Civil War soldiers and sailors, a veritable treasure trove of immigrant and ethnic history.

Analysis and discussion of the contents of these pension files have now been the topic of hundreds of posts on the website. They provide what is surely an unparalleled capacity to directly access the lived experiences of 19th century working-class Irish Americans (along with many other ethnic groups). Their potential spawned another research project, as across the course of a decade, examination of individual groups of files for website articles was combined with a systematic analysis of all c.168,100 currently digitised files in order to identify original wartime correspondence written by Irish Americans. As Naval Academy Museum. It is built around an examination of the recently digitised U.S. Navy Muster Rolls at the U.S. National Archives, which the project seeks to utilise to develop a new history of common sailors in the U.S. Navy in the context of race, ethnicity, and class. The navy provide an ideal vehicle for this type of study, as urban working-classes, immigrants, and African Americans are particularly prominent among them. Of the c. 118,000 Union men who served on the water during the conflict, over 30 percent were British or Irish born, c. 15 percent were African American, and many more were natives or ethnically affiliated to other countries. Importantly for Civil War Bluejackets, the majority of navy records have also been digitised, offering an opportunity to “follow” individual sailors across multiple record types, from enlistment rendezvous to on-board service and, via their pensions, into the post-war period.

Public participation lies at the heart of the project, as Bluejackets is reliant on citizen volunteers to help with the transcription of thousands of wartime Muster Sheets. Utilising the Citizen Science platform Zooniverse, the transcription phase of the project launched in September, and is now approaching the 600-volunteer mark (you can visit the project on Zooniverse here). This response demonstrates the power of platforms like Zooniverse for public-facing humanities projects, particularly within history. A vital aspect of Civil War Bluejackets is keeping volunteers engaged and rewarded for their hard work. To that end we are employing many of the same
scholars of the period are aware, such correspondence is an extremely scarce resource, despite the prominence of Irish American service. Ultimately, the analysis uncovered 1,135 wartime letters in the pension files, which were composed by 395 different Irish American soldiers and sailors, almost 98 percent of whom served as enlisted men. It now represents the most significant corpus of Irish American wartime letters yet identified, and arose as a direct result of an online public history project. On a personal level, the scholarly potential of these letters provided a unique opportunity for personal development, and the undertaking of a PhD at Northumbria University on the letters’ contents, which is currently titled: *Recovering the Voices of the Union Irish: Identity, Motivation & Experience in Irish American Civil War Correspondence, 1861-65*.

It is hoped that *Irish in the American Civil War* can continue to operate and develop into the future. A consistent effort to evolve is central to that desire; recently the editorial team was expanded to include Dr. Catherine Bateson and Brendan Hamilton as Associate Editors, bringing with them a welcome injection of new ideas and new expertise.

The skills acquired through public history and outreach are often highly transferable, particularly within the humanities. For example, the experience of running *Irish in the American Civil War* has proved particularly beneficial within the fields of archaeology and heritage, where I strategies employed at *Irish in the American Civil War*, with techniques such as blog articles, social media posts, videos and visualisations being used to share information about the navy and project progress. Every effort is made to keep the volunteers central to these outputs—for example, any interesting volunteer discoveries are explored and written up by the project team, to be shared as “Bluejacket Community Discovery” posts on the project website.

In addition to a regular flow of public-facing updates and outputs, and its overall academic research aims, *Civil War Bluejackets* is also designed to provide significant long-term benefit to all those interested in what Civil War sailors can reveal—be they academic, genealogist, or the “general public”. In addition to utilising volunteer transcriptions to develop computer learning software to help decipher 19th century handwriting, the team’s information scientists are also creating a database of all the muster roll information which will be linked to other naval records. This will be made freely available at project conclusion and should become a research-tool that benefits a wide and diverse audience. Given my personal background with *Irish in the American Civil War*, the mix of public and scholarly engagement that the *Civil War Bluejackets* project seeks to achieve is an exciting one. By its conclusion we should hopefully have much to share with you about what the navy can tell us about immigrant and ethnic history during this period—in the meantime, check in regularly with
have spent the majority of my career. They are also increasingly useful within history itself. There has been significant evolution within the field over the last decade, as more history projects seek to combine original academic research with public engagement and interaction. One of the most exciting developments in this regard is a growing awareness of the public desire and enthusiasm to contribute directly towards knowledge creation. The managed democratisation of knowledge generation is something that is particularly useful with large historical datasets, and it is something that lies at the heart of the Civil War Bluejackets project, in which I am currently engaged.

Damian Shiels is a Research Fellow at Northumbria University working on the AHRC funded project “Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the United States Navy, 1861-1865”. He is also the founder and Managing Editor of www.irishamericancivilwar.com.

www.civilwarbluejackets.com to see how things are progressing!
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