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The First Hurrah:
**James Michael Curley versus the “Goo-Goos” in the Boston
Mayoralty Election of 1914**

By

Michael C. Connolly

On January 13, 1914 James Michael Curley defeated South Boston’s Thomas J. Kenny in the race to serve as Mayor of Boston for the next four years. In Curley’s lengthy political career, spanning fifty years in and out of elective office, he would run for Mayor ten times and be successful in four of those contests.

There is much about the election of 1914 which suggests it to be perhaps the most crucial and formative of Curley’s political life. He was not the first Irishman elected as Boston’s Mayor, that distinction rested with Irish-born Hugh O’Brien who was elected in 1885. Nor was he popular across the native-immigrant divide as was Patrick A. Collins who served as Mayor from 1902-05. Neither was he the first Irish-American candidate for Mayor to have to deal with the Good Government Association, as did John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald in his successful 1910 battle against James J. Storrow.

But the weight of history, the tensions of decades of Irish thrust and Yankee recoil, made a transition difficult. With the defeat of their “best” candidate, James J. Storrow, in 1910, the Yankees retreated to a position of a minority of moralizing critics; with the subsequent

election of James M. Curley in [1914], the Irish turned to the politics of catharsis.¹

The 1914 mayoralty election would be an important break from the past in at least two significant ways. First, it represented the initial success of an Irish-American candidate running against the Irish-dominated Democratic Party machine. Whatever the latter-day realities of Curley's political style might become, this particular battle pitted him against the Democratic power brokers such as Mayor John F. Fitzgerald, maternal grandfather of the future President; Martin Lomasney, legendary ward politician and king-maker in Boston's Ward Eight; as well as P.J. Kennedy of East Boston, the paternal grandfather of the future President. Second, and for the purpose of this paper more importantly, the 1914 election represented a significant change in strategy on the part of the Yankees of Boston, a group quite familiar with the wielding of power in this city.

Curley shattered the cultural consensus that had existed in Boston. Previous Irish mayors had appealed overtly or discreetly to Irish and Catholic group loyalties but they had not attacked the Yankee community or questioned its cultural preeminence and civic values. On the contrary, there had for decades been a conscious effort on both sides to reach across the cultural divide. Curley, however, derided the Yankee community and its most prestigious institutions, from Harvard College to Beacon Hill. In a letter to a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, he wrote: 'The Massachusetts of the Puritans is as dead as Caesar, but there is no need to mourn the fact. Their successors-the Irish-had letters and learning, culture and civilization when the ancestors of the Puritans were savages running half-naked through the forests of Britain. It took the Irish to make Massachusetts a fit place to live in.'²

¹ William V. Shannon, "Boston's Irish Mayors: An Ethnic Perspective," in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, edited by Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 204. Hereafter referred to as Shannon.

² Shannon, 205-06.

By 1914 the Yankees had to contend with a politically active and organized Irish-American population which at this time composed roughly thirty-nine percent of Boston's population.³ The response of Boston's Brahmins to the Curley challenge was as interesting as the response of the Democratic machine faithful. The Yankee's promotion of Thomas J. Kenny of South Boston, a Democrat, Catholic and Irish-American, as the chief mayoral rival of Curley in this campaign was a revealing break from tradition and an illuminating change of tactic which marks, it could be argued, Boston's emergence into twentieth century American politics. The reaction of George Read Nutter, a leader of the Good Government Association, to the close previous mayoral victory of John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald in 1910 was predictable. "It certainly is a public calamity that such a discredited man should get back. This is the disastrous end of all the hard work of a year."⁴ The thought of a Curley mayoralty, however, must have sent shivers through the spines of most upstanding Boston Yankees. From this point on it became at least as feasible to construct electoral alliances on the basis of political philosophy as on the more sterile basis of either ethnicity or religion alone.⁵

In 1913 on the eve of his first campaign to become Boston's Mayor, Congressman James Michael Curley was securely positioned as one of the leading proponents of open immigration and, by extension, as defender of the poor and defenseless .

The more roguish aspects of Curley's cruder personality reflected the attitudes of a newer generation of American-born Irish who no longer viewed the sturdy ward bosses as father figures, a more rootless generation anxious to express its resentments against all forms of established rule, Irish and Yankee alike.⁶

³ Herbert M. Zolot, "The Issue of Good Government and James Michael Curley: Curley and the Boston Scene from 1897-1918," State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1975, p. 350. Hereafter referred to as Zolot.

⁴ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 196. Hereafter referred to as Goodwin.

⁵ See the novel, *All in the Family*, by Edwin O'Connor.

⁶ Goodwin, 244.

The National Liberal Immigration League had presented him with a silver loving cup, largely due to his energetic fight against the restrictive Burnett-Dillingham Act, and the ethnic voters of Boston were being primed to present Curley with an even greater electoral token of their esteem.

The freshman Congressman was able to maneuver himself onto two powerful and prestigious committees, the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Immigration, and he used these vehicles to maintain a high profile at home.⁷ It has been remarked that Curley acted in Washington more like a ward boss than like a Congressman. Although Curley had favorably exploited his political advantages up to this point, the mayoral campaign of late 1913 and early 1914 would place him directly in opposition to the two most powerful political pressure groups in Boston, i.e., the official Democratic machine on one hand and the Yankee-Brahmin-business interests on the other. It was in successfully overcoming these two seemingly insurmountable barriers that James M. Curley showed his stature as a politician and began to fashion his somewhat legendary career. There would always be conflicting loyalties and styles within the political life of Curley.

The Irish-American politician is an organization man ...the ability to accommodate differences, to find when in office suitable compromises in moral and other dilemmas, is his particular function. The rebel is of a different order. He rejects compromise and pursues principles, even unto death. The moral distance between the rebel and the politician is immense: the rebel seeks justice, the politician is content with order.⁸

The first challenge confronting Curley was to wrest control of a majority of the city's voting Democrats away from the incumbent and popular Mayor, John F. Fitzgerald, and the party organization that

⁷ For a discussion of Curley's progressive politics see Charles H. Trout, "Curley of Boston: The Search for Irish Legitimacy," in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, edited by Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 178-82. Hereafter referred to as Trout, "Curley of Boston."

⁸ Shannon, 203. This is a quote from Professor Thomas Brown.

faithfully supported him. The obvious question to be asked at this point is why did Curley challenge Fitzgerald and how did he think he could win?

[After the election of Fitzgerald in 1910] the Irish were to be in control of the politics and government of the city. Its destiny would be fought out within their ranks. How they would respond to that challenge would be the main thread in the political narrative for the next half century and beyond.⁹

Curley himself gave but scant evidence of his reasoning in his ghostwritten autobiography .

... the [ward boss] institution was outmoded by 1911, and was breeding party strife, petty animosity and cheap political chicanery, and was a roadblock in the way of enlightened city government.¹⁰

Perhaps the definitive reason for Curley's challenge to the ward boss system, and thus the Boston Democratic machine led by Fitzgerald in 1914, was the simple fact that his whole political career up to that point had been based on his status as a maverick challenging the established power.¹¹ This maverick image had begun early within his own constituency of Lower Roxbury (Ward 17) when he led opposition to the somewhat unpopular boss, P.J. "Pea Jacket" Maguire whom Curley perceived as being unresponsive to the real needs of his constituents. Curley's own home experience was perhaps instructive, for when his father, Michael Curley, died when James Michael was but ten years old, little if any help came from the ward boss. "Pea-Jacket left

⁹ Shannon, 200.

¹⁰ James Michael Curley, *I'd Do It Again*, Arno Press, 1976, p. 114. Hereafter referred to as Curley.

¹¹ Trout, "Curley of Boston," 169-172. "As his career unfolded, Curley constantly oscillated between a rejection of this past and a belligerent recognition of his origins. One moment, a political enemy noted in the 1930s, his language was pure Oxford; the next, it derived from Dogpatch." *Ibid.*, 172-73.

Sarah Curley and her two sons to shift for themselves.”¹² The future politician often referred to his humble birthplace as his “log cabin... Curley, for one, bore the scars throughout his life.”¹³

It was generally assumed that Honey Fitz would use his anticipated re-election as Mayor in 1914 as a springboard for a campaign for the United States Senate in 1916.¹⁴ Curley, however, was not prepared to wait upon Fitzgerald’s political inclinations because he had plans of his own. Thus when on November 28, 1913 Mayor Fitzgerald announced for reelection he was forced to concede that he would only serve two years of the four year term, a confirmation of his Senatorial ambitions. The jockeying for position had been intense leading up to Honey Fitz’s announcement, and at that point there were five candidates: Fitzgerald, Curley, Thomas J. Kenny, John R. Murphy and John A. Keliher, with two others considering or being promoted by Yankee organizations for the race, i.e., Andrew J. Peters and James J. Storrow. After less than one week of official campaigning, however, Fitzgerald suspended his activities allegedly because of a fainting spell brought on by physical exhaustion.¹⁵ In response to this, Kenny, Murphy, and Keliher all suspended their campaigning but Curley pressed on undaunted. After nearly two more weeks, on December 17, 1913, John F. Fitzgerald formally withdrew from the mayoralty race citing doctor’s orders. In his withdrawal statement he was laudatory of the three candidates who had suspended their campaigns in deference to his illness. His failure to

¹² Joseph F. Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1949), 17-23. Hereafter referred to as Dinneen. See also Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874-1958)* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1992), 31-34. Hereafter referred to as Beatty.

¹³ Trout, “Curley of Boston,” 170.

¹⁴ This would be the first directly elected Senator from Massachusetts. The recently passed 17th Amendment (April, 1913) gave this right to the voters directly, rather than to the state legislatures as had been the case since the founding of the Republic.

¹⁵ This physical exhaustion was significantly aided and abetted by Curley himself who had been actively spreading rumors about “Honey Fitz” and a young beauty by the name of Elizabeth Ryan and better known as “Toodles.” “Just one cartooned image of ‘the Little Napoleon’ kissing the voluptuous Toodles -- with her enormous chest daringly revealed, her painted cheeks and her huge brown eyes-would be enough to transform this pillar of the community into a fool.” See Goodwin, 246-53. See also Beatty, 136-39.

mention Curley was rightly perceived as a rebuke. “At this point, relations between the Mayor and his Roxbury rival had deteriorated completely.”¹⁶

Curley faced other institutional hurdles on the way to becoming Mayor. Seven of Boston’s nine major newspapers opposed his candidacy, and two in particular were quite hostile, the *Boston Transcript* and the *Boston Post*. Only two newspapers were perceived as being neutral in the race, the *Boston Journal*, which had a small circulation and leaned toward the Progressive Party, and the *Boston Globe*.¹⁷

It would be instructive to trace the mayoral campaign through the pages of some of Boston’s more influential newspapers by looking at the coverage of the *Boston Herald* in early November, 1913; the *Boston Evening Transcript* in early December, 1913; and finally a bit more in depth at the most neutral of the newspapers, the *Boston Globe*, for the two weeks leading up to election day, January 13, 1914.

On November 5, 1913 the *Boston Herald* announced that Congressman Curley would run for Mayor if Fitzgerald did not, and toward that purpose he would immediately begin collecting the required 5,000 nominating signatures. This maneuver was seen as having “...added complications to the mayoralty situation.”¹⁸ It also reported that Thomas J. Kenny had been chosen by the mayoral nominating committee and the executive committee of the Citizen’s Municipal League (CML). It reported that the CML had 280 members and that the chairman of its executive board was Richard Olney. The League’s membership has been described as more broadly based than the Good Government Association, although “...the CML operated largely as creatures of the GGA.”¹⁹ In the same edition of the *Herald* there was, under the heading “Kenny’s Advance Steady,” a biography of the man who would shortly emerge as Curley’s only opponent. Thomas J. Kenny was described as being forty-eight years of age and a life-long resident of South Boston. It traced his professional career from his early professional years in the law firm of Morse, Loomis and Lane, which by

¹⁶ Zolot, 323.

¹⁷ Zolot, 344-45.

¹⁸ *Boston Herald*, November 5, 1913, p. 1.

¹⁹ Zolot, 353.

1913 would be known as Morse, Hickey and Kenny.²⁰ He was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1897, had been a member of the Boston School Committee from 1898-1907, and of the Boston City Council from 1910, serving as its President since January, 1913. In that capacity, "... [Kenny] has frequently performed the duties of acting mayor in the absence of Mayor Fitzgerald."²¹ It concluded that the dual keynotes of Kenny's campaign would be the development of Boston's commercial resources as well as bringing higher standards of efficiency to municipal administration. Curley's own assessment of his rival was, predictably, less glowing.

Honey Fitz withdrew, but he put Thomas J. Kenny, a stooge, in against me. Kenny, who lived in South Boston, was an earnest gentleman who had served on the School Committee and was President of the City Council. He was blessed with the support of James J. Storrow and other "Goo-Goos," including the Citizens' Municipal League and the Democratic city bosses.²²

The *Boston Herald* of November 6, 1913 reported that Congressman Andrew J. Peters had quit the race. Wednesday, November 5, had been the first day for taking out nominating papers as it was the first day after the state elections. Papers had been taken out for the following potential candidates:

John F. Fitzgerald	John A. Keliher
Thomas J. Kenny	Earnest E. Smith
Andrew J. Peters	John R. Murphy
James M. Curley	William T. A. Fitzgerald ²³

²⁰ Perhaps this was as much a reflection of Boston's changing ethnic composition as of Kenny's ambitious rise within the legal profession.

²¹ *Boston Herald*, November 5, 1913, p. 3.

²² Curley, 115.

²³ *Boston Herald*, November 6, 1913, p. 1.

The *Boston Herald* of November 7, 1913 was very instructive as to why the Citizen's Municipal League (CML) had chosen an Irish Catholic and a Democrat to wage electoral battle on their behalf. The paper reported a speech by Richard Olney.²⁴ Olney had presided the previous evening over the CML's revealing endorsement of Thomas J. Kenny for the office of Mayor.

[Kenny] had stood the test of fire and never been defeated. The vote that will be obtained by you from the citizens of South Boston will be stronger than it would be for any other man you could endorse. It would weaken the armor of Mr. Fitzgerald and would take from him the greatest asset he has ever had. He can not use against Mr. Kenny the slanders or innuendos that were used against our candidate [Storrow] four years ago.²⁵

In addition to showing the consensus that Fitzgerald would be their main opponent, this quote is one of the clearest indications from a leader of the Brahmin-Yankee-business community of their motives in choosing Thomas Kenny as their standard bearer. In doing so they were using the political tactic of co-option or "divide and conquer" which had been successful in many places and times before and since that date. The strategy is to divide the ethnic or cultural loyalties of your opponent's supporters to the advantage of your own candidate.

On December 2, 1913 twenty-seven lives were lost when a South End flophouse, the Hotel Acadia, burned to the ground. Curley immediately seized upon this issue as an example of the corruption and inefficiency of Fitzgerald's administration, and he demanded the immediate firing of Arthur G. Everett, the Building Commissioner. Curley promised this would be his first action if elected as mayor, and it subsequently was. The *Boston Evening Transcript* also attacked the

²⁴ Richard Olney, former Attorney General and Secretary of State in the administration of President Grover Cleveland, had played a decisive role in the suppression of the Pullman Strike. Ironically, on the birth date of John Fitzgerald Kennedy just a few years later (May 29, 1917), his father, Joseph Kennedy was "elected a trustee of the Massachusetts Electric Company to succeed Richard Olney." See Goodwin, 274.

²⁵ *Boston Herald*, November 7, 1913, p. 3.

Fitzgerald administration over this issue, but it did so while implying as much criticism of Curley as of Fitzgerald.

The disastrous holocaust which has just occurred in our city emphasizes the imperative need of a departure from the custom prevailing of selecting as chief executive of our city the representative of any particular coterie, clique or combination of men.²⁶

Of course this somewhat sanctimoniously implied that the GGA, CML and other respectable organizations of that type in no way represented any such “coterie, clique or combination.” The class bias of Boston’s newspapers was readily apparent in this mayoral primary and election.

As the race proceeded the rhetoric heated substantially, especially after the December 17th withdrawal of Mayor Fitzgerald. An example would be Thomas Kenny’s stinging rebuke of Curley just two days after the exit of Honey Fitz .

There has been no man in my experience on the city government who has shown less capacity and whose record in public life is more questionable than that of Mr. Curley.²⁷

That same edition also reported a South Boston rally in support of its own native son, Kenny, around the slogan, “Help elect the first mayor South Boston has ever had.” It was reported, however, that Curley aides claimed their candidate would carry South Boston. Clearly both of these positions could not be simultaneously correct. Concerning the recent withdrawal of Fitzgerald, the *Transcript* revealed confusion on the part of machine Democrats.

The politicians of the Fitzgerald-Lomasney element have not recovered from the blow that the Mayor dealt in his

²⁶ *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 4, 1913, p. 2.

²⁷ *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 19, 1913, p. 2.

withdrawal. Machine politicians at City Hall were responding, 'We are all at sea.'²⁸

During the last two weeks of the campaign Curley constantly praised the *Boston Globe* for demonstrating impartiality. By this time the campaign had developed into a clear-cut battle between Curley and Kenny, with both camps characteristically claiming that victory was imminent. On New Year's Day, 1914, the *Boston Globe* reported that the Ballot Law Commissioners were scheduled to begin an investigation into protests filed on the nomination papers of Kenny, Curley and John A. Keliher, who had only recently announced his withdrawal from the race. Another indication of the Democratic machine's continuing confusion was the statement that "Martin M. Lomasney is still on the fence."²⁹

Another of the major campaign issues covered in this edition was Kenny's persistent charge that a \$20,000 bank note in Curley's name had been endorsed by local contractors, and he asked for the names of contributors to Curley's campaign. These charges were made in Curley's own Roxbury ward. Simultaneously, however, Curley was speaking on Kenny's home turf, South Boston, where he chided Kenny for his false accusations and asked for a "humble apology." He further challenged Kenny, and his campaign staff as well, to a joint debate at the Mechanics Building. Curley seized the offensive by posing the question, "What interest has the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad in the Mayor's Chair?" He answered his own question by asserting that they owned \$9 million worth of property in Park Square which they hoped would appreciate in value through municipal improvements. Curley promised to raise tax assessments forcing sale or development by the Railroad, and if he was hampered in his efforts he promised to appoint a new Board of Assessors within one week.³⁰

The very next day the *Boston Globe* reported that both Curley and Kenny had withdrawn their electoral protests against each other after Chief Justice Bolster of the Municipal Court found "flagrant violations" of election laws by both candidates. It further reported that both names

²⁸ *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 19, 1913, p. 2.

²⁹ *Boston Globe*, January 1, 1914, p. 3.

³⁰ *Boston Globe*, January 1, 1914, p. 1.

would appear on the final ballot.³¹ In the same edition Curley stayed on the offense by challenging the integrity of both Kenny and his supporters, the GGA, the CML, and by extension the New Haven Railroad.

With the disclosures which have come to light so far in this campaign, as to the method employed by the former attorney for the GGA and the CML, I want to ask you how any working man can afford to vote for Mr. Kenny. Mr. Kenny was selected to be the candidate for Mayor on the ticket of the CML by the chairman of that organization, Richard Olney, and the campaign fund is provided by the New Haven [Railroad]....³²

Kenny received a much-needed boost when four prominent Democratic leaders came out in his support, one from Dorchester's huge Ward 20 and three from East Boston, including ex-Alderman Patrick J. Kennedy. All the support of ward bosses and leaders could do little to erase the obvious differences in style and energy displayed by the two candidates. While Kenny was attending Roslindale house parties asserting, ". . . better streets would save money," Curley was speaking at several large rallies in Charleston hammering home allegations of Kenny's nomination paper "forgeries."³³

The *Boston Globe* of January 3, 1914 reported that John F. McDonald, ex-chairman of the Democratic State Committee and Honey Fitz's successful campaign manager in 1910, was to become Curley's manager as well. McDonald confirmed that the last few days of the contest would show no let-up in their efforts when he announced plans to "... extend the Curley campaign organization to every ward and to launch a 'flying squadron' whose activities will last until the close of the campaign."³⁴ The *Boston Evening Globe* of that same night confirmed

³¹ *Boston Globe*, January 2, 1914, p. 1.

³² *Boston Globe*, January 2, 1914, p. 3. "A proven friend of the railroads, Olney was a former director of the Boston & Maine and a counselor to the New Haven railways." See Beatty, 141.

³³ *Boston Globe*, January 2, 1914, p. 3.

³⁴ *Boston Globe*, January 3, 1914, p. 1.

that the name of Earnest E. Smith would not be on the ballot, and that only the names of James M. Curley and Thomas J. Kenny would appear in the contest for Mayor.³⁵

The *Boston Sunday Globe* of January 4, 1914 carried Curley's statement that the *Boston Globe* was the only newspaper in Boston, which accorded him "absolutely fair treatment." Curley charged that he was opposed by "... the press of Boston, the salable ward leaders and every other purchasable element in the city."³⁶

Further evidence of the huge gulf separating these two men as campaigners was supplied by the *Boston Globe* of Monday, January 5, 1914 which reported that Curley had made twenty-two speeches the previous day in contrast to Kenny who consulted with advisors and made no speeches. Another article announced that the GGA election booklet was ready and that one would be supplied to every voter before Election Day. It featured in bold type the heading, "CRISIS IN CITY POLITICS: BOSTON THREATENED WITH NEW YORK TAMMANY RULE," and issued a warning.

If Mr. Curley is elected, the present charter, now a deterrent of bad administration, will be threatened night and day from the Mayor's chair with all the power at his command.³⁷

The GGA predicted the defeat of Curley and his Tammany Club just as its New York model had recently been defeated in the election for mayor of that city. Their booklet offered an alternative, however, in promoting the candidacy of Thomas Kenny whose election would mean "... a square deal for all." Curley's campaign manager, John F. McDonald, attempted to strip away false veneers when he described the campaign in cold terms. "It's a real Democratic contest, although our opponents would have the people believe it is a nonpartisan campaign. The Democrats are not fooled by that sort of talk."³⁸

³⁵ *Boston Evening Globe*, January 3, 1914, p. 1.

³⁶ *Boston Sunday Globe*, January 4, 1914, p. 14.

³⁷ *Boston Globe*, January 5, 1914, p. 4.

³⁸ *Boston Globe*, January 5, 1914, p. 4.

On January 7, the journalistic war was enlivened by the report that Kenny, speaking in Curley's own Ward 17, asserted that Curley was "...what his honor, the Mayor, described as a political hog," ever seeking jobs for himself and his friends."³⁹ Curley retorted by formally charging Kenny with hiring "plants" to jeer Kenny at his own rallies. He revived another familiar theme by asking "... why the banking interest, the railroads and corporations are so anxious for Mr. Kenny's success in the campaign?" And finally with the election less than one week away we have the first indication that the writing was beginning to appear on the wall with the disclaimer that "Kenny's campaign managers are not counting on a speech by Mayor Fitzgerald on behalf of their candidate...."⁴⁰

As if to answer any remaining doubts about his preferences in the election, Mayor Fitzgerald was quoted the next day as saying

I dislike the word neutral as applied to political campaigns, but my policy of noninterference has been maintained, and will be carried out during the rest of the campaign.⁴¹

As an indication that the GGA election booklet was causing Curley some last minute concerns, or alternatively simply as a last precaution, the *Boston Globe* of January 11, 1914 reported that James Michael Curley had changed the name of his Tammany Club to "Pro Bono Publico" ("for the public good") thus removing "... the principal objection to my candidacy advanced by my opponents...."⁴² It may also have been one last joke on the "Goo-Goos" in this campaign, as the original title was revived immediately following Curley's electoral success.

Kenny's despair was obvious in the *Boston Globe* of January 12, the day before the election. The headlines read, "Kenny Men Hope Aid from Mayor Yet -- Martin Lomasney Also is Still to be Heard From." A

³⁹ *Boston Globe*, January 7, 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Boston Globe*, January 7, 1914, pp. 1 and 3.

⁴¹ *Boston Globe*, January 8, 1914, p. 5.

⁴² *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1914, p. 8.

Kenny advertisement in the same paper showed the same despondency with the slogan, "Vote Tomorrow -- Save the City."⁴³ Half of the question raised by the morning paper were answered by the evening edition of January 12. It led with the headline, "Lomasney for Curley" and the subtitle was, "Mayor Fitzgerald will not take sides."⁴⁴ Martin Lomasney had obviously sensed Curley's prospects for victory and was maneuvering to reap whatever rewards a last minute conversion might yield him. His assessment of the electoral count was astute, but his hope for a rapprochement with the victor would soon be dashed.

To conclude the election coverage of the *Boston Globe*, the edition of January 14, 1914 reported, "CURLEY WINS BY 5720 MAJORITY." It reported that the Roxbury Congressman had captured sixteen of Boston's twenty-six wards, and the final vote was given as 43,262 to 37,542. It proceeded to report that there was a record cold in Boston, with below zero temperatures for all but one of twenty consecutive hours. This cold and the accompanying high winds were seen as being in part the reasons for 12,000 fewer votes cast in 1914 than in the 1910 election, far greater than the difference between the two candidates.⁴⁵

The argument has been made that James Michael Curley faced rigid opposition from Democratic machine politicians as well as from most of Boston's newspapers. Curley's equally ferocious struggle against the Yankee establishment of Boston, especially as represented by their political mouthpiece, the Good Government Association, must also be examined. The GGA had been founded in 1903 mainly as a Boston Republican attempt to counter the ever-growing political influence of the Democratic dominated Irish-Catholic community. Its founders included a progressive element including Louis Brandeis, Edward Fileen and Robert A. Woods, and its stated intention was to promote worthy candidates for public office on a nonpartisan basis. The "Goo-Goos," as Curley called them, also had close ties to the Boston Finance Commission and the Citizens Municipal League. The GGA failed to live up to its lofty and noble ideals due largely to the self-serving nature of some of its less progressive members.

⁴³ *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Boston Globe (Evening Edition)*, January 12, 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Boston Globe*, January 14, 1914, p. 1.

... the organization quickly fell under the domination of conservative groups like the Chamber of Commerce, the Boston Bar Association, the Boston Real Estate Exchange, and the Public Information League. Concerned mainly with structural changes, especially in municipal finance, GGA members seldom spoke for social reform.⁴⁶

The struggle between Curley and the Yankee establishment has perhaps been preserved most graphically in the fascinating diaries of George Read Nutter.

Curley's methods and his open flaunting of the standards championed by the good government movement, only caused people like George Read Nutter, the leading force in the GGA, to harbor a great distaste for him. To Nutter and his allies, Curley represented the worst sort of unscrupulous Irish politician. Even more than that, he symbolized the threatening social upward thrust of all the groups of non-Protestant immigrants.⁴⁷

"A Brahmin like George Read Nutter-son of Harvard, president of the Massachusetts Bar Association, and a long-time Curley nemesis in the GGA," viewed his rival as appealing to the "excitable" Irish, those with no idea "of moral values in politics." To Nutter, Curley "defiled everything political-in standards, in methods, in cheapness and vulgarity."⁴⁸

Nutter's diary entry of November 7, 1913 clearly showed the determination of the GGA to ease the way for the election of Thomas J. Kenny.

This evening I attended a little conference at the Copley Plaza called to talk about Kenny's campaign. There were

⁴⁶ Charles Hathaway Trout, "Boston During the Great Depression: 1929-1940," Columbia University, 1972, p. 88.

⁴⁷ Zolot, 467-68.

⁴⁸ Trout, "Curley of Boston," 186-87.

present Storrows...Henry E. Hagan, Charles P. Curtis, R.J. Bottomly and myself. We devised methods to prevent the Republicans from putting up a candidate... Ernest Smith's campaign caused a good deal of worry, particularly if he is backed up by the Progressives. At the request of the conference I wrote to Brandeis in New York asking him to write to Smith. A good deal of time was taken up about a campaign manager, and McDonald and Ballantine [sic] were both considered....⁴⁹

On November 12 the name of James M. Curley was mentioned for the first time as a serious candidate. The assumption was still that Honey Fitz would be their opponent.

The mayoralty situation grows interesting. There seems on the horizon the chance of a split among our opponents. [?] Fitz has coyly withheld his candidacy. Jim Curley, the head of the Tammany Club of Ward 17 has jumped in, first on the pretext that he would of course withdraw if the Mayor ran, but now with the intimations he will stick. In the meantime Ernest Smith begins his psychological appeal by asking support against "the invisible government" whatever that may mean.⁵⁰

On November 13 Nutter's entry revealed that an informal committee of the GGA meeting at the Copley Plaza had endorsed Thomas Kenny. The entry of November 21 was especially revealing of the ethnic animosity held by some Brahmins toward the increasingly powerful Irish political leaders.

Last night the chairman of the Democratic Ward Committees held a dinner at which the mayoralty was

⁴⁹ Diaries of George Read Nutter, Volume V, November 7, 1913. The following excerpts all come from the Nutter Diaries, Volume V, covering the period from October 3, 1912 through June 11, 1914. These diaries are housed in the Massachusetts Historical Society. Hereafter referred to as Nutter Diaries.

⁵⁰ Nutter Diaries, November 12, 1913.

discussed. The list of the chairmen was a [?] thing. Every one of them an unknown quantity in the real life of this city -- all of them except one, Henry Frothingham, are Irish men, banded together for loot, without any standard of public service or any ideal of true administration. One's heart sinks at the thought of combating this organized band and of instilling into the electorate any real appreciation of it all.⁵¹

The list of Democratic ward leaders, or their chief representatives, to which Nutter was referring, does clearly show the Irish domination of Boston ward politics.

- Ward #
1. Thomas R. Kelly
 2. Michael J. Leary
 3. John J. Mahoney
 4. James A. Hatton
 5. Timothy J. Buckley
 6. Philip J. McCaffrey
 7. Christopher P. McCaffrey
 8. Joseph P. Lomasney
 9. Robert J. Howell
 10. John J. Purcell
 11. Henry Frothingham
 12. James J. Murphy
 13. Jeremiah J. McNamara
 14. Thomas F. O'Brien
 15. John F. Clancy
 16. James T. Mooney
 17. James Michael Curley
 18. James P. Timilty
 19. John C. Norton
 20. Andrew J. Kelley
 21. John T. Kennedy
 22. Patrick McManus
 23. Patrick J. Boady
 24. John J. Hoar
 25. John H. Brogie
 26. Joseph M. Kiggen⁵²

⁵¹ Nutter Diaries, November 21, 1913.

⁵² Zolot, 352. For a description of the political leanings of the wards through analysis of their socioeconomic status in later years see Shannon, 209-10.

On November 30, 1913 George Nutter recorded his visit with John A. Sullivan, the head of the Boston Finance Commission. He reported that Sullivan was worried at the inactivity of the Kenny campaign and that he asked Nutter to confer with Kenny, which Nutter immediately did. After an hour Kenny had agreed to draw up a platform and send it to Nutter. With these two meetings in mind, Nutter's entry of December 2, just two days later, revealed the degree to which Kenny was controlled by the good government movement.

A meeting with Kenny and his manager, Walter Ballantyne, at the room in the Parker House ... Kenny has a platform to go to the papers tomorrow. It is the same as that received from John Sullivan by me this morning in response to my suggestion of Sunday. But Sullivan of course is keeping very quiet, as the head of the Finance Commission.⁵³

The next day Nutter recorded that Kenny's statement was out in the morning papers and favorably commented on. An enclosed headline read, "Kenny Proposes Radical Reforms at City Hall."⁵⁴

The entry of December 11, 1913 further reported on Nutter's attempts to clear the field for Kenny by putting indirect pressure on Ernest Smith to withdraw. On December 18 Nutter reacted to the news that Fitzgerald had withdrawn with optimism, and the belief that the Curley candidacy would be divided, or at least not as formidable as that of Mayor Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald came out this morning with a withdrawal from the mayoralty race because of his health. And he speaks kindly in his statement of everybody except Curley. The omission is significant. This will throw confusion into the ranks and ought to help Kenny....⁵⁵

⁵³ Nutter Diaries, December 2, 1913.

⁵⁴ Nutter Diaries, December 3, 1913.

⁵⁵ Nutter Diaries, December 18, 1913.

George Read Nutter began the New Year with a long entry commenting on the state of the world, the nation, Massachusetts and finally Boston. One gets the sense of a proud person who was seeing his security shattered by the intrusion of a new type of political leadership.⁵⁶ Nutter commented thusly on Governor David Ignatius Walsh and Representative James Michael Curley .

The State is turned over to Walsh.... We expect at best a colorless regime, and shall be lucky if we have not a crowd of Irish incompetents landed upon his offices. In the city the extraordinary course of events has taken Fitz out of the race and it's now between Kenny and Curley; a clean cut issue, Curley's gang the worst yet.⁵⁷

The next day Nutter wrote about his speech at a "thinly attended" rally for Kenny. Kenny had told him that he was "very tired" and Nutter thought that he looked ". . . drawn in the face." On January 10 he spoke of attending Kenny's final rally in the Tremont Temple, which had drawn an overflow crowd. Nutter wrote of there being a "queer conglomeration of speakers" and a "royal welcome" given to Kenny. However, this entry seems to presage Kenny's imminent defeat, and in so doing raises the ethnic issue once again .

[Kenny's] speech did not measure up to the occasion. He is not magnetic but on the contrary cold and austere. He will make a good Mayor if he can get in, but has a slow hand at getting. I felt downcast tonight. It's a question of getting at the suburban vote. If the Republicans and Protestants turn out, Kenny can get in. Otherwise this wretched Curley, the worst yet, will be Mayor.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Shannon, 208 writes, "Many turned to politics because they enjoyed politicking. As a form of entertainment, politics is analogous both to a sporting competition on the field and to a melodrama on the stage. There are heroes and villains, the thrust and parry of conflict, the rising tension of the campaign reaching a clear-cut decision of election day."

⁵⁷ Nutter Diaries, January 1, 1914.

⁵⁸ Nutter Diaries, January 10, 1914. This less than enthusiastic appraisal of Kenny is reminiscent of Curley's subsequent description of the last Republican to hold the mayor's

On Election Day, January 13, 1914, George R. Nutter wrote about the bitter cold and also about his reaction to the news that Curley was victorious. His feelings were quite intense.

A very cold day - six below zero when I arose at seven o'clock, and the wind blowing so hard that it was exhausting to face it. It was Election Day, and of course very poor weather for a heavy vote. I voted after breakfast and walked with real difficulty against the wind to the Copley Plaza - where I met Storrow.... As I went home in the evening, I saw in the papers that Curley was elected by nearly 6000 votes. This was not [?] unexpected. Kenny made a good fight, but there was a good deal of apathy. . . The Fitzgerald men, at first incensed at Curley, apparently came around, Lomasney openly supported him, and the machine lined up... It is a deep humiliating disgrace! The worst depth to which this unfortunate city has sunk. Fitz was bad enough but he is an angel compared to this man.⁵⁹

One final page from the Nutter diaries taken from January 15, two days after the election, gave Nutter's considered opinion as to the factors involved in Curley's victory over Kenny. Nutter seemed nearly as bitter toward those he perceived as his natural allies as he did toward his natural political enemies, the Irish Democrats.

Clippings from newspapers all over the country show the widespread feeling that Boston has disgraced itself. The blame seems to rest first on the stay at homes, of which there were over 30,000 in a total registration of about 110,000. These were probably Republicans and Protestants, many of whom were deceived into thinking this fight one between two Irish factions, and some of

office, Malcolm Nichols, as "the fifty-third card in a pack-a joker." Nichols was a man who seemingly could not get things done because "he simply had no bugle in his voice." See Trout, "Curley of Boston," 185.

⁵⁹ Nutter Diaries, January 13, 1914.

whom were Progressives influenced by Smith and Hale. ... Then the Irish were solid for the machine. One is tempted to say, as usual, it certainly seems as if they had very little standard. The Jews also believed Curley was their friend because of his attitude against restriction of immigration.⁶⁰

Curley's taunting of the GGA did not end with this election. Throughout his career "Curley's enemies helped to prolong the appeal of his showmanship..."⁶¹ He continued to call its members "hamstringers," "panderers," "flunkies," "lackies," and "toadies... of the economic royalists." When city bankers refused to support his "Boom Boston" fund in 1914 Curley threatened to remove city funds from their banks. "On the day of his inauguration, he taunted them by threatening to sell the Boston Common, but not before installing a high-pressure pumping station."⁶²

Ultimately, the mayoral contest of 1914 reflected that a majority of Boston's voting citizens wanted someone in that office that not only cared about balance sheets but also about real conditions in their neighborhoods and homes.

For the immigrant poor who made up the majority in Boston and many other American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their first political need was not the efficient, economical delivery of services, important and desirable as that was; rather their need was to be integrated into the larger community. They had to feel that Boston was really their city and that its government belonged to them.⁶³

⁶⁰ Nutter Diaries, January 15, 1914.

⁶¹ Shannon, 208. An example of this would be the infamous case of Curley's imprisonment for impersonating two Irish ward heelers, Bartholomew Fahey of Galway and James Hughes of Meath, for the purpose of taking a postal civil service exam. Curley would insist throughout his career that "He did it for a friend." As luck would have it, the Brahmin judge in the case who set a bail that Curley thought to be punitive carried the name Francis Cabot Lowell - manna from heaven! See Trout, "Curley of Boston," 176.

⁶² Trout, "Curley of Boston," 182.

⁶³ Shannon, 202.

The final vote count for the 1914 election shows James M. Curley with 43,262 votes or 53.5% and Thomas J. Kenny with 37,522 votes or 46.4%. The total number of males registered to vote was 110,945 and the number of those registered who actually voted was 81,559 or 73.5% of the electorate.⁶⁴

There would be numerous ways to analyze the results of the 1914 election. One way is to look at the “Irish factor.” In computing the percentage of Irish-Catholics resident in the wards won by the two candidates we find that those won by Kenny averaged 34.7% Irish-Catholic vote while those won by Curley were a full 10% higher, averaging 44.7%. These figures are somewhat distorted in that among Curley’s victories were non-Irish ethnic communities such as the North End, where he took 67.5% of the vote, and the West End, where he captured 75.4% despite the fact that these were the two wards with the lowest percentage of Irish-Catholic voters with 12.6% and 20.2% respectively. When these two wards are removed from Curley’s victories, we find that the average Irish-Catholic element in those remaining was 48.75%, or very nearly one-half. This is statistically significant in a city whose Irish-Catholic population was estimated to be 39% of the total of all Bostonians.

On reflection, the contention by George Read Nutter that Kenny probably lost the election because “Republican and Protestant” voters failed to vote apparently does not hold up. As reported earlier the voter turnout in 1914 was 73.5%. To analyze this factor, one may construct two sets of wards for this election. One would represent the Yankee strongholds of the Back Bay and suburbs (Wards 10, 11 and 20-26) and another set would represent the Irish strongholds of Charlestown, South Boston and most of Roxbury (Wards 3-5, 13-15, 17 and 19). Computing the voter turnout rates for these two units reveals that the Yankee wards held 55,265 voters, of which 39,664 or 71.8% voted. The Irish wards totaled 26,470 voters, of which 13,592 or 76.9% voted. Thus we see that the Yankee wards were just below the overall average, by less than 2%, while the Irish wards were slightly above the average, by about 3 1/2%. This difference does not appear to be statistically significant, and is probably not sufficient to explain Kenny’s loss in cultural terms as Nutter had done. It is true, however, that more than 10,000 fewer citizens

⁶⁴ Boston City Documents, Volume 1, 1914, pp. 150-59.

voted in 1914 than in the mayoralty election of 1910. Logically the frigid temperatures and winds could have accounted for a good deal of this decrease.

Sticking with these two representative collections of Yankee and Irish wards, another very significant fact emerges from further electoral analysis. In 1910 Honey Fitz garnered fully 70% of the vote of the selected Irish wards. This was clearly unacceptable to those wishing to unseat the upstart politicians, and the GGA tactic of co-option was attempted. The result of this maneuver was that James Curley received 66.7% of the vote in these same wards, a drop of only 3.3%. Simultaneously, however, an unexpected effect of this tactic was felt on the Yankee's own turf. When James Storrow contested the mayoralty against Fitzgerald the battle lines were clear, and the Back Bay and suburbs responded by giving Storrow nearly two votes for every one to Fitzgerald. Honey Fitz polled only 36.4% in these nine wards. In the attempt to confuse and divide the opposition, the GGA actually succeeded in hurting themselves instead. Whether, as Nutter suggested, many Yankees saw the race as an Irish Democratic faction fight or not, the results were significant. While losing only 3.3% in the Irish wards from Fitzgerald's totals, Curley was picking up 10.8% in the Yankee strongholds. In fact, James Michael Curley managed to poll an incredible 47.2% of the vote in the Back Bay and suburbs combined.

Finally, by comparing the 1910 and 1914 election results we can see that the GGA tactic was an overall failure, and that it was only marginally successful in Thomas Kenny's own district, South Boston. In 1910 Honey Fitz had swept South Boston from James J. Storrow with 70.9% of the vote. In 1914 Curley in no way equaled this accomplishment. However, he did capture two out of three of South Boston's wards, 13 and 14, and lost in Kenny's own ward 15 by only 148 votes. Curley, as he had predicted, also managed to carry South Boston as a whole with 53.4% of its vote. With the one exception of South Boston James Michael Curley had proven to be a more formidable candidate against Thomas J. Kenny than had John F. Fitzgerald against James J. Storrow. The strategy of the Good Government Association and its supporters in Boston's Yankee community had failed in 1914.

[The Irish] arrived in the United States a politicized people and they retain this characteristic. The Irish had been able to extract such concessions as they did in

Ireland by community solidarity. As a result, their political culture puts a high value on loyalty and on strong leadership.⁶⁵

The impact of one political event, such as this election in 1914, could be profound. Curley's victory diminished the aura of his Irish-American contemporary, Mayor John F. Fitzgerald. In this weakened stance just two years later "Honey Fitz" unsuccessfully contested for a seat in the United States Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge. The historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, has contemplated the possible wider consequences of Curley's victory over Fitzgerald, the sitting Mayor.

And if Fitzgerald had become the Senator from Massachusetts in 1916 instead of Lodge, the history of the country and indeed of the entire world might have been different, for it was from that very Senate seat that Lodge played his decisive role in the crushing defeat of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the defeat that, in President Woodrow Wilson's words, 'broke the heart of the world.'⁶⁶

James Michael Curley, whom George R. Nutter had described as "the worst yet," had bested the "Goo-Goos," and was now the elected Mayor of Boston. His Honor was now in 1914 with this "first hurrah" well on his way to building the unique political legend of the "Purple Shamrock," the "Rascal King," and the cocky protagonist of Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah*.

⁶⁵ Shannon, 203.

⁶⁶ Goodwin, 252.