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Justin Dolan Stover

Introduction

- 1 The modernisation of warfare in mid-nineteenth century Europe, epitomised by the speed and coordination of the Prussian Army during its war with France in 1870-1, placed ever-increasing demands on the endurance, resistance and charity of civilian populations. The contribution of mobile field surgeries and improvised military hospitals in France during this period – particularly those staffed or organised by the Irish – have been the subject of several studies¹. This article seeks to expound the role of the Irish College, Paris, as a military hospital during this period, and to provide insight to the trials of the College, its staff and neighbouring districts during the war and Paris Commune. It will do so by exclusively analysing the archival records of the *Centre Culturel Irlandais* – the site of the former Irish College whose collections have only recently been catalogued and made available to the public. In particular, this article will draw upon the diary-memoirs of Charles Ouin-la-Croix, Administrator of the Irish College between 1859 and 1873, who organised the military hospital and witnessed the destruction of the Latin Quarter first-hand. In doing so a more complete understanding of French society's reaction to war and local upheaval during this transformative period may be achieved.
- 2 Several overarching questions will be addressed in this article, such as the treatment of neutral institutions in Paris during the war, the coordination of local charity and the conduct of soldiers and militiamen. Specifically, this article will explore the extent to which the personal account of Ouin-la-Croix, a single Parisian in a single district of Paris, can be integrated into the broader historiography of the period. While Ouin-la-Croix's evidence is certainly an indispensable primary source document for those seeking a more intimate understanding of how the Franco-Prussian war affected ordinary Parisians, this

article will nevertheless determine the methodological limits to which his writings may be applied.

War, sickness and destruction

- 3 The broader international intrigue which preceded the Franco-Prussian war made little impression on the students and faculty of the Irish College. The war had erupted toward the end of the academic year, July 1870; the annual exit of students and their professors to Ireland nearly coinciding with the exodus of thousands of Parisians for the front². Only the College Administrator, Charles Ouin-la-Croix, and two servants remained in residence³. Ouin-la-Croix, whose tenure had begun in 1859, brought more to the Irish College than skills in administration. He had been the personal chaplain to Louis-Napoleon, and had proven himself as a religious scholar: his book, *Corporations et confréries*, demonstrated his aptitude as writer.⁴ Struck by “the very strange spectacle” which developed in Paris during this period, his observations provide a first-hand account of the Irish College during the war, as well as the social atmosphere of the fifth *arrondissement* and greater military movement around the city⁵.
- 4 Like many Parisians, however, Ouin-la-Croix remained ignorant of wider military and political developments, being confined to the College between September 1870 and February 1871⁶. Writing to the College Superior, Thomas McNamara, who had evacuated to Ireland, he conveyed the relative anxiety that gripped Paris as it awaited news of the war and its progress:

À l'heure où je vous écris, jeudi, midi, nous n'avons pas encore de nouvelles décisives sur le sort de notre armée. On parle de nombreux combats qui seraient livrés à notre avantage. Plaise à Dieu qu'il en soit ainsi ! À bientôt, la bataille décisive⁷.

- 5 As Administrator, Ouin-la-Croix had been entrusted by the Irish bishops to maintain the property of the Irish foundations in Paris during the war and to offer the Irish College, “on grounds of charity and humanity”, to the minister of war as a military hospital for sick and wounded soldiers. McNamara stressed the terminal nature of this arrangement, and also instructed Ouin-la-Croix that,

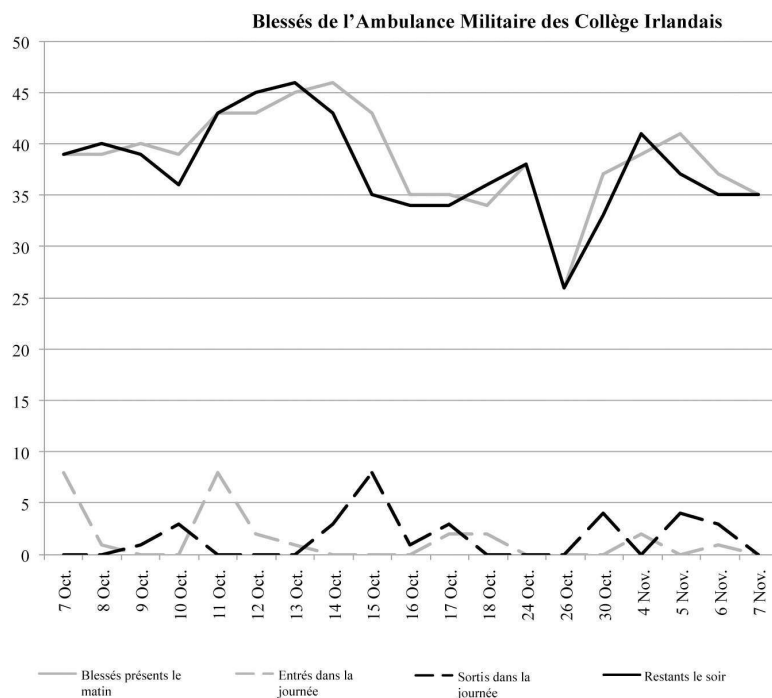
in making such a grant, to declare at the same time, that the buildings, though in the guardianship of the French Government, are nevertheless British property: and, with the view of more effectually maintaining their neutrality, it would be well, in pursuance of authorisation accorded us by the British Embassy, to display the flag of Great Britain over the gateway⁸.
- 6 A Red Cross flag was hoisted adjacent to the Union Jack, and Ouin-la-Croix set to work transforming the College into a military hospital, officially titled “*l'Ambulance militaire du Collège Irlandais*”. While lamenting “the cruel anxiety in which it has pleased God to place her [France] at this moment”, Ouin-la-Croix described his preparations in a letter to McNamara on 8 September:

J'ai mis 22 lits dans la salle de récréation, et 28 lits dans la salle d'étude, en tout 50 lits. J'ai quêté dans nos environs les draps et le linge que le Collège ne possédait pas. J'ai recruté pour infirmiers et infirmières des personnes pieuses du voisinage, très honnêtes et très

dévouées, qui donnent gratuitement leurs temps et services. J'ai donné une chambre particulière au chirurgien des blessés, avec tous les égards convenables. J'ai vu Mr Le Maire républicain du Panthéon qui m'a beaucoup remercié en disant : « il y a long temps que je connais le Collège Irlandais de Paris et son dévouement à la France. » [...] Mr Le Colonel Corbet délégué par Mr le Ministre de la Guerre est venu voir notre ambulance, et a été touché de tout ce qui a été fait. J'ai organisé le tout de mon mieux pour honorer l'Irlande si sympathique à notre malheur¹⁰.

- 7 In its capacity as a place of recuperation for wounded soldiers, as well as those incapacitated by illness, the Irish College was spared the more horrific casualties of war. Serious cases were treated at more ably equipped sites, such as the nearby *hôpital militaire Val-de-Grace*, before being transferred to the Irish College for out-patient care. The first of these sick and wounded arrived at the Irish College on 17 September. Charge of care was not left entirely to Ouin-la-Croix, however; he was aided by several members of *l'Ambulance de la Presse* – one of the voluntary medical service organisations that had established mobile field hospitals during the war¹¹. In particular, Dr. F. de Ranse who, along with his colleagues Dr. Guardia and M. Lapeyrère, was later praised by Ouin-la-Croix for his professional devotion: “*Les nombreux obus qui passaient nuit et jour autour et au dessus du Collège n'ont pas interrompu une seule de leurs visites*”¹². A medical student named Farges and Albert Brochin, the son of a leading organiser of *l'Ambulance de la Presse*, were also on call, as were three pharmacists, M. Desnoix, M. Pelisse Penner and M. Lebegue. An order of the *Sœurs de l'Espérance*, as well as several young priests offered their humble service as nurses and for spiritual support¹³. The Dean of nearby St. Genevieve, Father Bonnefoy, also assisted in spiritual matters. He was subsequently described by Ouin-la-Croix as a loyal chaplain to the College hospital, who offered consolation and guidance during his frequent visits¹⁴. De Ranse conveyed a further impression of these ecclesiastics to the *l'Ambulance de la Presse* following the war: “*Ils ont montré autant d'abnégation dans ces humbles fonctions que de courage comme brancardiers sur les champs de bataille*”. Ouin-la-Croix also paralleled their service with that of soldiers: “*Les différents champs de bataille des environs de la Capitale nous ont montré à tous qu'ils n'étaient pas moins braves sous le feu de l'Ennemi que dévoués au chevet des malades et des mourants*”¹⁵. Indeed, one priest, a 19 year-old named Berrier, died in the “line of fire” after contracting disease from a patient¹⁶.
- 8 The College was visited and inspected by both Georges Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, and Louis Jules Trochu, the Governor of Paris and interim head of state following the establishment of the Third Republic in September 1870, shortly after the siege commenced. In one instance, Trochu was observed moving between the rows of beds, each patient receiving from him a kind word or a smile. When sent off with shouts of *Vive la France! Vive le Gouverneur de Paris!* Trochu, it was said, answered only with signs of anxiety and doubt¹⁷.
- 9 Administrative records of *l'Ambulance militaire du Collège Irlandais* trace the number of sick and wounded who entered and left the hospital, as well as the cost of their treatment and, in some cases, the nature of their wounds and illness. It is difficult, however, to provide an accurate tally or comprehensive details of the sick and wounded treated at the College hospital. Contemporary reports provide the ambiguous estimate of 300 casualties treated; a commemorative plaque in the College courtyard cites the same number. Nevertheless,

various pieces of data found within the archives of the *Centre Culturel Irlandais* provide other information regarding the treatment of the sick and wounded, and the general workings of the hospital. Evidence of the early intake of the hospital, displayed in the figure below, illustrates the number of daily entrants between 7 October and 7 November 1870¹⁸.



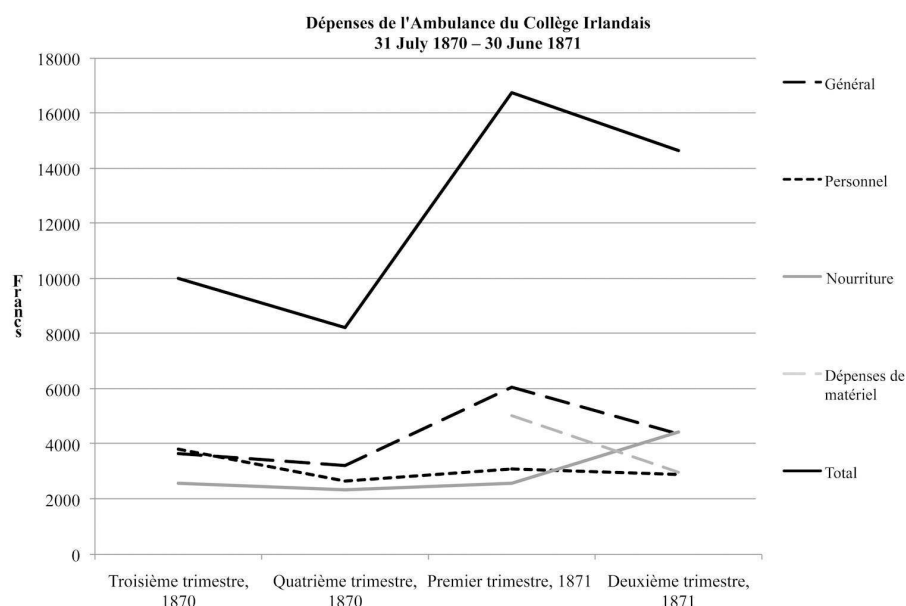
- 10 While relatively low, the total number of men admitted to the hospital approached 200 by December 1870 and, it was claimed, 300 by March 1871¹⁹.
- 11 The fluctuation in the total number of sick and wounded, both during this brief period and overall, can be partially explained by the nature of their casualty. Many soldiers suffered fever, bronchitis, gastro-intestinal trouble, dehydration or dysentery, and could be released in a relatively short time²⁰. Other more serious illnesses, such as pneumonia, required extensive care and often proved fatal²¹.
- 12 Joseph Bretelle, a 37 year-old *Franc tireur*, appears to have been the only man to die of war wounds; he had been shot through the abdomen and perished shortly after arriving at the Irish College in November 1870²². Death was a rare outcome amongst the patients treated; approximately fifteen soldiers died in the College during this period²³. With the exception of three men, Bretelle, Francois Maxmiliez Lefort and Jean Pierre Ladot, they were all young men in their early twenties, overtaken by illnesses they had contracted in the field. The youth of these men made an indelible impression on Ouin-la-Croix:

Je pense que vous ne lirez pas sans douloureuse émotion la liste funèbre de ces vaillants soldats, tous moissonnés par la guerre à la fleur de leur âge, pleins de santé et d'espérance, séparés de leurs familles, appelant vainement de leur soupir leur tendre mère absente

²⁴.

- 13 The majority of casualties, however, recovered from their sickness. The physical environment of the Irish College was reported by de Ranse to have provided an excellent atmosphere for recuperation. He particularly noted the courtyard, which provided patients with fresh air and exercise, and the large lecture halls which allowed for upwards of 30 beds. The College was stocked with medical supplies through local donations and by the *l'Ambulance de la Presse*, and funded by private contributions. Although Great Britain remained officially neutral during the conflict, charity was still forthcoming. For instance, tobacco and various woollens were received “from patriotic donations made through England” in December 1870²⁵. Local merchants also contributed, illustrating charity within the Latin Quarter as well as the Irish College’s dependence upon it. Some donations were generic: administrative and medical supplies for the hospital, as well as contributions to repair any damage, were certainly abundant. Other donors, however, provided charity through their profession. For instance, the horticulturalist Adolphe Pelé of rue de Lourcine gave two chestnut trees and one hundred perennials for the College garden. Ferdinand Bodin, who ran a fashion shop on rue Soufflot, donated a coil mattress and a small bit of furniture, and J. Guillemin of rue St Jacques provided stationary for the sick and wounded soldiers recovering at the College²⁶.
- 14 Direct financial assistance was also forthcoming. Over 7,600 francs were collected through the efforts of McNamara and the archbishops of Ireland, and sent to Ouin-la-Croix to help relieve the debt of war²⁷. Despite fiscal and material charity, however, the cost of maintaining the College hospital proved difficult – particularly during the siege of Paris in early 1871 when supplies became scarce and inflation ran rampant. The large increase in total spending during this period, illustrated below, provides evidence of this

²⁸.



- 15 The hospital organised under *l'Ambulance de la Presse* comprised only a portion of activity at the College during this period. The siege of Paris, which intensified in early January 1871, and the Paris Commune presented direct threats to the physical property of the College, as well as its ecclesiastical authority. Extensive quantitative evidence of these events is absent from the Old Archives of the *Centre Culturel Irlandais*. Detailed insight is

provided, however, by Ouin-la-Croix, who kept a running diary of events from September 1870 through May 1871. He also wrote weekly to McNamara and College faculty in Ireland describing the effects of bombardment on greater Paris, and the shelling which occurred in the vicinity of the College²⁹. These documents highlight the centrality of the Irish College during the siege and Commune, the damage inflicted on the local neighbourhood, and both the anxiety and generosity of French society as it was brought under the pressure of collective duress. While it would be difficult and tedious to recount all of Ouin-la-Croix's thoughts and actions in this short space, some of his more poignant observations are presented here³⁰.

- 16 The central location of the Irish seminary meant bombs fell in great proximity to the College hospital, its patients and inhabitants. Two periods in particular caused great anxiety to Ouin-la-Croix. The first occurred between 29 November and 2 December, when artillery rained on central Paris from the directions of Bicêtre, Hautes Bruyeres and Montrouge, the impact of which caused the walls and windows of the College to shake incessantly. "*Le spectacle était saisissant*", exclaimed Ouin-la-Croix; "*Il excitait d'autant plus notre fiévreuse anxiété qu'il portait avec lui l'espoir de la délivrance, espoir, hélas ! tristement déçu. [...] Aujourd'hui, si désolés de la France*³¹." A simple wooden plaque bearing the name of Ouin-la-Croix as *Gardien* of the Irish College was erected to commemorate the event. Discovered only recently in apartments belonging to the Irish foundations, it reads:

Du haut de ce campanile les soldats de l'ambulance du Collège
Irlandais ont compté anxieusement les cent mille coups de canon
livrés pendant les batailles du 29 novembre et 2 décembre 1870 qui se
livraient en France.

- 17 Christmas brought temporary relief, but damage to Paris had been substantial. On New Year's Day 1871, Ouin-la-Croix noted the way in which Paris had been cast back into "*l'ancien temps*". The capital's 200,000 gas lights had been extinguished by the bombardment, only to be replaced piecemeal by small individual lanterns which glowed eerily through the smoke and haze: "*aucun de ces brillants étalages d'étrences; ni bonbons, ni jouets*"³².
- 18 The second period of bombardment was more direct and intense. Awoken around midnight on 5 January by an explosion that shook the entire College, Ouin-la-Croix hurried to the patients in the halls below. He found everyone awake, "*comptant avec effroi les sifflements des obus qui passaient par dessus et autours du Collège, qui éclataient à droite, à gauche, ou plus loin, avec un indicible fracas*³³". The sick and wounded were helped to the cellar of the College, which had been prepared in case of such intense bombardment. Panic and anxiety continued throughout the night in every inhabitant save one, an infant who had come to the College with other refugees from Arcueil. This baby, described as being as chubby as "the small angels of our cupolas", appeared unencumbered by the burden of fear saddled upon the adults, and slept "innocent of the peril that broke our courage". "Charming child!", remarked Ouin-la-Croix, "may you grow without ever seeing the same disasters³⁴!"
- 19 During the bombardment the inhabitants of the Irish College were amazed at both the volume of munitions dropped on Paris, and the slow response of their leaders. Confined to the cellar and unable to communicate with the outside or learn the fate of loved ones, anxiety rose as soldiers and civilians could be heard scurrying along the street above³⁵.

- 20 The Irish College escaped a direct hit from Prussian artillery during this period, which is remarkable considering the destruction wrought upon the greater fifth *arrondissement*³⁶. The locality of destruction was detailed by Ouin-la-Croix, who described the bombs as birds of prey; several burst over the College or in the adjacent street, throwing shrapnel against College buildings. Two explosions in particular caused greater damage. Remnants of the first fell on the interior courtyard of the College at two in the morning on the night of 15-16 January, after crashing through the wall of the tavern on the adjacent rue Lhomond. The projectile crushed a street lamp on its descent and exploded upon impact with the wall, “*produisant une si énorme commotion que le Collège tout entier tressaillit jusques dans ses fondements, et parut osciller un instant sur ses bases ébranlées*”³⁷. Percussion from subsequent explosions shook the foundation of the College, and caused the garden in the courtyard to collapse and sink to a depth of three metres³⁸.
- 21 The second bomb ricocheted off the door of the College on the night of 20-21 January, launching debris through one of the windows of the College hospital. Ouin-la-Croix collected the shell fragments of the first bomb and the stone fragments left by the second as souvenirs so that, he explained, future visitors of the Irish College could view evidence of the giant, though ineffective fight for Paris by her inhabitants and defenders³⁹.
- 22 The College continued to serve as an *ambulance militaire* throughout the siege, but was empty by mid-March 1871. In the end, Ouin-la-Croix’s personal souvenir came not from shell fragments, but in the form of experience and survival. As he explained in his memoir, “I shall like to remember it, and already I feel some pride in saying: I was there⁴⁰”.

The Paris Commune

- 23 Conflict had reached the Irish College indirectly during the Franco-Prussian war, coming in the form of wounded soldiers and indiscriminate missiles. The Paris Commune brought direct confrontation. Men armed with anti-clerical ideology, and guns to enforce it, visited the College several times between April and May 1871. Now virtually alone after the closing of the College hospital, Ouin-la-Croix embraced what he referred to as a “solitary captivity” and penned a second memoir. These writings display language overtly critical to the Commune and its aims and are limited, unfortunately, to the author’s brief interactions with the Communards.
- 24 Wild rumours circulated throughout Paris following news of the taking of the Hotel-de-Ville by members of the Commune on 18 March 1871. Ouin-la-Croix observed Communards consolidating their position throughout the Latin Quarter. A barricade was erected at the entrance to rue des Irlandais, and canons and armaments were hauled to the Panthéon atop whose massive dome fluttered the red flag⁴¹. Ouin-la-Croix described the planting of what he referred to as “this sinister emblem”:

L’opération fut prompte dans le courant de l’après midi du même jour, je vis de mes yeux attristés des ouvriers escalader la coupole Génovefain [sic], scier les deux bras de la Croix qui la dominait, et attacher à l’arbre du Salut ainsi tronqué les couleurs sanglantes d’une Liberté tyrannique, d’une Égalité menteuse, d’une Fraternité barbare

42.

- 25 Placards proclaiming various decrees and ordinances dotted the streets, and an intermittent chorus of clarions and drums announced the triumph of the Commune and the suppression of religious congregations⁴³. As these events occurred during Holy Week, Ouin-la-Croix deemed them to be an “excessive sacrilege”⁴⁴.
- 26 Rifle shots fired from rue Lhomond were heard in the early hours of 4 April; they were followed by pounding on the door of the Irish College, and calls for “*les Pères Jésuites*”. The concierge, François Osée, drew back the bolt and the door opened to reveal several National Guards, two of whom immediately crossed the threshold of the College, rifles at the ready. Before they were able to speak Ouin-la-Croix seized the Union Jack that stood inside the vestibule, and spoke: “Monsieurs, [...] this is the Irish College, and the flag that you see in my hand is the British flag that protects it⁴⁵.” The guards explained that they themselves had come to protect the College, and asked whether they could be permitted to stand guard. Ouin-la-Croix explained that the College required no protection as it was a neutral institution⁴⁶; he reminded them that it had served as a hospital during the siege, and had been friendly to the National Guards, having allowed them to drill in the courtyard. The guards withdrew, but remained outside the College until six the following morning. They passed the night talking of recent events, and when a separate contingent of National Guards passed on the rue Lhomond escorting several ecclesiastical prisoners they shouted, “*À la Potence ! À la Guillotine*”⁴⁷!
- 27 Further suppression of religious figures and property took place during the week. On Wednesday Archbishop Darboy was arrested, and on Holy Friday Notre Dame was sacked, its doors shut and barricaded. Mixing himself amongst a crowd of “silent, saddened” Parisians, Ouin-la-Croix reported on their demeanour as the cathedral’s religious treasures were carted away:
- La spoliation achevée, le chargement complété, voitures et agents s’éloignèrent escortés par une troupe nombreuse de gardes nationaux, puis la foule des spectateurs inertes et stupéfaits se dissipa lentement, et de par-ci par là j’entendis ces mots « triste ... triste⁴⁸ ... »
- 28 Having observed the aims and actions of the Commune to be fiercely anti-clerical, Ouin-la-Croix returned to the Irish College and, along with Osée and the other *maîtres* in residence, Jean Conus and Sebastian Pfeiffer, began a self-imposed internment which lasted from 7 April through 27 May.
- 29 News of the violation of the Belgian embassy in Paris, another neutral institution, caused a wave of anxiety within the Irish College. On 18 April Ouin-la-Croix wrote to the British ambassador in Paris, Richard Lyons, requesting an official document declaring the neutrality of the Irish College. The ambassador’s secretary, Edouard Malet, readily expressed the embassy’s willingness to protect British subjects. A decree was then subsequently drawn up and posted to the door of the Irish College below a large Union Jack forming what Ouin-la-Croix described as “a small diplomatic arsenal”⁴⁹.
- 30 Communal decrees continued to be issued⁵⁰, and the arrest of ecclesiastics and confiscation of church property persisted into late April. Ouin-la-Croix was twice approached by local Communal police during this period; in anticipation of arrest he often disguised himself when moving from the College to a nearby residence, and provided the College caretakers with a script of ambiguous answers to give to the

Communards should they ask for him⁵¹. Nevertheless, on 4 May a detachment of National Guards surrounded the College and forced their entry. A small man in a frock coat, who claimed to be the local police captain of the Commune, addressed Osée who had been working quietly in the garden, and demanded to conduct a search of the College. It was denied once again through the avenues of British neutrality, although this did not prevent additional unsuccessful visits from Commune emissaries during the following days⁵².

- 31 The French army entered Paris on 21 May. Although he was appalled by the violence with which the Commune was suppressed, Ouin-la-Croix had little sympathy with their ideology and aims. The Communards, he later stated, claimed to be the only men capable of teaching the people; they held many under lock and key while shouting “Freedom! Freedom!”, and yet exercised a most hideous tyranny⁵³.
- 32 Several bloody episodes during the second siege of Paris occurred in the vicinity of the Irish College. Bullets and bombs again whistled over the courtyard, and sniping and close combat could be heard coming from the nearby rue d’Ulm⁵⁴. Ouin-la-Croix also witnessed a young man beg for his life before he was executed:

Il se mit à pleurer amèrement, pria, supplia : mais les ordres étaient inexorables, et au bout d’une seconde deux coups de feu retentissaient fracassant la tête du malheureux jeune homme insurgé. Sa cervelle et son sang jaillirent tout autour. C’était navrant. Ô guerre civile ! Qui pourra jamais te maudire assez⁵⁵!

- 33 The army, under the command of Marshal MacMahon, spent little over a week suppressing the Commune. Before posting his memoir of events to McNamara and the bishops in Ireland, an authentic account he claimed to have constructed “only in the ceaseless noise of rifle and artillery fire between 3 April and 27 May⁵⁶”, Ouin-la-Croix provided a final assessment of the destruction wrought over the previous nine months, as well as the human and physical destruction it had caused:

La ruine partout ! Le palais des Tuileries brûlé, le Palais Royal brûlé, l’Hôtel de Ville brûlé, des Théâtres, des Magasins, des groupes entiers de maisons brûlées [...] La mort partout ! Des monceaux de cadavres couvrant les rues, les trottoirs, les avenues ; le sang coulant à flots, innocents et coupables tombant des deux côtés des remparts ou des barricades, Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Paris assassiné dans sa prison avec ses prêtres, Monseigneur Surat tué au milieu de la rue, toutes les faces les plus hideuses du crime se montrant à la fois au milieu de la Capitale incendiée⁵⁷.

Recovery and reorganisation

- 34 Despite the intimacy in which it experienced the Franco-Prussian war and Paris Commune, the Irish College escaped major damage. The same cannot be said, however, for the country house at Arcueil, another property of the Irish foundation used for recreation and official visits of the Irish clergy.

- 35 The nearly six thousand inhabitants of Arcueil evacuated the town in September 1870 ahead of the Prussian advance. It was feared that, in addition to soldiers, looters posed a great threat to property. Having first suffered from “a party of marauders who pillage[d] the whole town, as far as they would find anything in it⁵⁸”, a second wave of destruction came not from the Prussians, but from French troops. The annual College report revealed that a contingent of *Gardes Mobiles* “destroyed everything, so as to leave only the walls and roof standing⁵⁹”. Ouin-la-Croix described the destruction wrought by French civilians and soldiers on the country house at Arcueil throughout the war:

Il n’y existe plus, ni portes, ni croisées, ni volets, ni lambris, ni parquets. Beaucoup d’arbres manquent, ainsi que plusieurs tables du réfectoire et des chalets: elles ont été enlevées pour servir aux terrassements de la redoute des Hautes Bruyères située sur les coteaux d’Arcueil, de sorte que d’ustensiles pacifiques qu’elles étaient elles ont été transformées en machines de guerre⁶⁰.

- 36 Estimates for work, services and materials required to repair and restore the house totalled nearly 20,000 francs. Who was to pay for these repairs? Financial reports of the period reveal a relatively low level of expendable income following tabulation of *recettes* and *dépenses*⁶¹. Fortunately, an indemnity fund had been established in the early nineteenth-century, negotiated on several occasions between 1814 and 1818, to provide relief for damage done to British property during the French Revolution⁶². In May 1871 McNamara and two College professors, Thomas Murphy and John McHale, proceeded to London to press their claim upon Parliament through the Liberal representatives of Ireland, most prominently Isaac Butt. The Treasury initially claimed that his fund had already been used; further investigation, however, revealed that misappropriation had exhausted the reserve⁶³. The house at Arcueil sat in ruin for several years, being repaired piecemeal from funds reluctantly conceded by the British government. It was still being repaired in 1902 when the sale of the house was considered by the Irish bishops.
- 37 The declaration of the Third Republic also brought drastic change to the administrative structure of the Irish College. The most direct and significant effect this had on the College was that it abolished Ouin-la-Croix’s position of Administrator in 1873 in favour of a *Bureau gratuit* – an administrative board consisting of seven members, five of whom were appointed by and directly responsible to the French government⁶⁴. Perhaps most controversial from the Irish bishops’ point of view, College appointments, most significantly the *Superior* and *l’Econome*, were delegated to the Minister of Public Instruction, Jules Simon. This reorganisation was officially outlined in a decree of the *Conseil d’État* on 22 January 1873, and reflected the greater trend of administrative centralisation which was to become a staple of the early Third Republic⁶⁵. The nature and meaning of this decree cannot be downplayed: its ten articles not only radically changed the way in which the Irish College was governed, they formed a block of contention that would complicate relations between the Irish College and French government for over 25 years.
- 38 The *Bureau gratuit* would institute further economy toward the end of the nineteenth-century, but in 1873 the question remained of what to do with Ouin-la-Croix who had faithfully served as Administrator since 1859⁶⁶. Ouin-la-Croix initially applied for the Canonry of St. Denis upon the recommendation of the Irish bishops. David Moriarity, the Bishop of Kerry, and McNamara, who retained his position as Superior, both wrote long,

descriptive letters praising Ouin-la-Croix's tenure at the Irish College, his initiative in establishing the College hospital during the war and the personal danger he endured during the siege of Paris and civil unrest which followed⁶⁷. The succeeding Minister of Public Instruction, Anselme Batie, identified two obstacles that stood in the way of Ouin-la-Croix's appointment: first, the Canonry was not yet vacant, and second, the National Assembly planned to divide the position between two estimations⁶⁸. Because of his long and loyal service, the *Bureau* granted Ouin-la-Croix a temporary pension of 2,000 francs until he could find a suitable position⁶⁹.

- 39 This compensation was soon called into question as the Irish College struggled financially during the early years of the Third Republic. McNamara explained to the bishops in 1876 that the deficit run by the College to support Ouin-la-Croix had been checked only through an increase in student fees – a fact of which the students remained ignorant. “They may come to know the pretensions of the Ex-Administrator”, McNamara explained, “and it is rather much to expect they will patiently bear to be made contributors to so unwarrantable a charge⁷⁰”.
- 40 Continuous pressure was brought to bear on the French government to provide a solution for Ouin-la-Croix, whose unfulfilled situation it had effectively created. Finally, after intercession on behalf of the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, Ouin-la-Croix was promoted to the Canonry of St Denis in 1878. His appointment meant the final suppression of the office of Administrator and completed the organisational transition of the Irish College as it had been dictated in 1873. It also permitted the *Bureau gratuit* to re-allocate Ouin-la-Croix's temporary pension toward three additional student bourses. Ouin-la Croix retained this position until his death in 1880 at the age of 61.
- 41 The reorganisation of the Irish College following the establishment of the Third Republic, the abolishment of the office of Administrator and the dismissal of Ouin-la-Croix all occurred in quick, orderly succession. This in many ways typified French administrative bureaucracy of the period, but also provided a precursor toward the Third Republic's increasingly secular attitude toward religious institutions – particularly in the realm of education.

Conclusion

- 42 The memoirs of Ouin-la-Croix provide invaluable insight into the relationships between Parisians during the Franco-Prussian war and Paris Commune, the locality of war and destruction and the impressions left on individuals who were removed from the wider social and political tension which existed during this period. It is this final point, however, that perhaps limits the scope of Ouin-la-Croix's observations toward wider historical studies of the period. He was not as politically sophisticated as other contemporary diarists who left observations of the same events, such as Victor Hugo or Gustave Flaubert. The Irish College had enjoyed relative seclusion since the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, and its administrators and professors kept a tight rein on students, who were often discouraged from becoming too familiar with French customs and influences.
- 43 Within these limitations, however, there are also benefits to the memoirs. As a witness to war and destruction of the Latin Quarter, Ouin-la-Croix recorded events in a singular context, one ignorant of wider military or political movements. Although his sentiments

were profusely Catholic, he nevertheless portrayed events as he observed them – particularly during the Paris Commune, when his religious passions could easily have justified excessive slander.

- 44 Overall, the memoirs of Charles Ouin-la-Croix, much like other archival resources housed at the *Centre Culturel Irlandais*, provide evidence of a Parisian community swept up in a tumultuous period of French history. Their integration into wider historical scholarship will only help to increase our understanding of individual reactions to war and social upheaval, while at the same time providing solemn observations of the dichotomy of human destruction and charity.
- 45 I would like to thank the Centre Culturel Irlandais for its generous support in funding this research. I would also like to acknowledge Carole Jacquet, Anaïs Massiot, Marion Mossu and the staff of the Old Library and Archives for their professionalism and hospitality during my stay in Paris as a fellow of the Irish College. The catalogue of the Old Library and Archive is being continually updated and expanded, and the digitisation of important archival material is ongoing. For more information visit [www.centreculturelirlandais.com].

NOTES

1. Irish participation in the Franco-Prussian war was the subject of three dated but nevertheless relevant articles featured in *The Catholic Bulletin* and *The Irish Sword*. See James Quinlan, “Irish cannon-fodder in 1870”, *The Catholic Bulletin*, 12:8 (1922), p. 539-44, G.A. Hayes-McCoy, “The Irish company in the Franco-Prussian war, 1870-71”, *The Irish Sword*, 1:4 (1952-3), p. 275-83, and John Fleetwood, “An Irish field-ambulance in the Franco-Prussian war”, *The Irish Sword*, 6:24 (1963-4), p. 137-48. For a survey of voluntary hospitals employed throughout France during the Franco Prussian war, see M. Guivarc’h, “Les ambulances civiles pendant la guerre franco-prussienne (19 juillet 1870-28 janvier 1871)”, *e-Mémoires de l’Académie Nationale de Chirurgie*, 6:2 (2007), p. 57-61; and for a distinctly British perspective of Red Cross services and observations of the war, see Valentine A.J. Swain, “Franco-Prussian War 1870-1871: Voluntary Aid for the Wounded and Sick”, *British Medical Journal*, 3 (1970), p. 514-17.

2. *Centre Culturel Irlandais* (hereafter CCI), Archives, Paris: Annual report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, 1870-71, A2.b76; *Annales de 1870-71*, A2.k1.

3. The Irish College endured a less complicated relationship between its Rectors, Administrators, the French government and the Irish episcopate prior to the declaration of the Third Republic in 1870 and subsequent re-ordering of its internal administration in 1873. Between 1849 and 1873 the religious direction of the Irish College, as well as the temporal organisation of its property and economy, were directed by two men: the College Superior, an Irish ecclesiastic nominated by the Irish bishops for approval by the Minister of Public Instruction, and the Administrator, traditionally a French ecclesiastic nominated by the Archbishop of Paris.

4. Charles Ouin-la-Croix, *Corporations et confréries*, Paris, 1859 (CCI, Old Library, Paris: B2395).
5. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.h81 (Charles Ouin-la-Croix to Thomas McNamara, 14 Sept. 1870).
6. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871) p. 1. See also Alistair Horne, *The Terrible Year: the Paris Commune*, London, Phoenix, 2004 ed., p. 20.
7. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.h81 (Ouin-la-Croix to McNamara, 1 Sept. 1870).
8. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.b76; A2.h82 (McNamara to Ouin-la-Croix, 27 Aug. 1870).
9. *Ibid.*, A2.b76 (Ouin-la-Croix to McNamara, 28 Aug. 1870).
10. *Ibid.*, A2.h81 (Ouin-la-Croix to McNamara, 8 Sept. 1870).
11. The Irish College was one of many civil hospitals organised by *l'Ambulance de la Presse*. Others, organised by subsequent groups such as *la Société de Secours aux Militaires blessés*, met the growing need for humanitarian and medical aid during the war. A most detailed account of the revolution in mobile medical treatment can be found in Marcel Guivarc'h, *1870-1871, Chirurgie et médecine pendant la guerre et la Commune, un tournant scientifique et humanitaire*, Paris, L. Pariente, 2006.
12. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 5.
13. It was later reported that, with the aid of these priests and nuns, those who died at the College did so in a state of Christian grace, "having received all the aids and consolations of religion". CCI, Archives, Paris: Annual report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, 1870-71, A2.b76. Ouin-la-Croix also commented on this aspect of their service: "*Tous ces soldats morts aussi pieusement qu'ils avaient bravement combattu, munis des sacrements de l'Eglise.*" CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871) p. 8.
14. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 9.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 8; CCI, Archives, Paris: *Rapport médico-chirurgical sur l'ambulance des irlandais*, E4.a9 (Dr. F. de Ranse, c. Mar. 1871).
17. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871) p. 9-10.
18. CCI, Archives, Paris: *l'Ambulance de la Presse*, A2.b82 (c. Nov. 1870).
19. *Ibid.* *Ambulance des Irlandais*, A2.b97 (L'Econome Directeur, 6 Jan. 1871).
20. *Ibid.* *Répertoire alphabétique des Noms des Blessés*, A2.b84 (s.d.); *Cahier de l'Hôpital Militaire des Irlandais*, salle 2, A2.b93 (various dates). For an additional list of wounds encountered and treated at the Irish College during this period, see CCI, Archives, Paris: *Rapport médico-chirurgical sur l'ambulance des irlandais*, E4.a9 (Dr. F. de Ranse, c. Mar. 1871).
21. One such case was that of Alexandre Lunet, a young *Garde Mobile*. For a detailed account of his illness, CCI, Archives, Paris: *Certificat de Visite après Décès*, A2.b95 (c. Nov. 1870).
22. CCI Archives, Paris: Wounded soldiers transferred to or from the Irish College, Paris, A2.b98-9 (c. 1870-71).

23. This number is only approximate due to the inconsistency of hospital records. Some names appear twice in separate lists, other evidence neglects to incorporate complete listings of patients. A database incorporating numerous files on sick and wounded soldiers, as well as cases which proved fatal was constructed from various files. It reveals that approximately 15 men died in the College ambulance out of the roughly 205 who were treated. See CCI, Archives, Paris: List of deaths in the College in connection with the war, A2.b83 (c. 1871).

24. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 7.

25. *Ibid.* A2.b94 (*L'Officier Principal d'administration comptable* to Ouin-la-Croix, 31 Dec. 1870).

26. Donations occurred at various times: J. Guillemin (31 Dec. 1870), Ferdinand Bodin (19 Jan. 1871), and Adolphe Pelé (28 Feb. 1871). CCI, Archives, Paris: *Ambulance du Collège irlandais, années 1870-71 guerre des Prussiens, Guerre de la Commune, Dons-Paiements*, A2.e.71, (Ouin-la-Croix, 15 June 1871). For an outline of expenses incurred by the College during this period, and a list of invoices for standing orders for food, see CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.e74.

27. *Ibid.*

28. CCI, Archives, Paris: Dépenses du Collège Irlandais, 31 July 1870 – 30 June 1871, A2.e73 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 Sept., 31 Dec. 1870; 31 Mar., 30 June 1871).

29. The content of these letters is mentioned in passing by McNamara, though they are not part of the archival collections at the Archives. CCI, Archives, Paris: Annual report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, 1870-71: A2.b76). Also, it is important to note that Ouin-la-Croix recorded his impressions on two separate occasions, forming two separate memoirs. The first was penned on 20 February 1871, and the second on 30 May following the suppression of the Paris Commune.

30. McNamara paints Ouin-la-Croix in two contrasting lights during this period. An annual report which he prepared for Irish bishops during the period portrays the Administrator as a hero: "M. La-Croix had much to suffer, as well as the other inmates, more particularly during the last month of the siege, when provisions became scarce in the city. They were reduced to the necessity of living on black bread, with horse, mule, ass and even dog flesh. He remained, however, perseveringly at his post, giving proof to the last of his invincible fidelity and devotion to the College." However, after reading Ouin-la-Croix's manuscript of the two sieges, McNamara is somewhat skeptical of the events which it described, as his contribution to the College *Annales* for the same period suggests: "The narrative is substantially correct, with the exception of his own personal dangers". CCI, Archives, Paris: Annual report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, 1870-71, A2.b76; *Annales de 1870-71*, A2.k1.

31. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 10-11.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

33. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 18.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 19. This child would have been roughly fifty years-old when Paris was again bombed by the Germans toward the end of the Great War, giving Ouin-la-Croix's statement great irony.
35. Both of these themes are also explored by Alistair Horne, *The Terrible Year*, p. 20-22.
36. Another contemporary witness, Juliette Adam, observed that "more than three thousand bombs fell around the Jardin des Plantes and the Luxembourg." Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: the French 1799-1914* (London, Penguin, 2009), p. 238, quoting Juliette Adam, *Mes illusions et mes souffrances pendant le siège de Paris* (Paris, 1906), p. 303; 306.
37. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 22.
38. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 3. With the aid of mason and mining engineer M. Prédelles, and some creative placing of shrubs, the garden was eventually set right.
39. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 22.
40. *Ibid.*
41. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 5.
42. *Ibid.* *La coupole Génovefain* is located within the *Lycée Henri IV* on rue Clovis, very near the Irish College.
43. See, for instance, "Décrets et articles de la Commune", Eugène Protot, 7 May 1871, in CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 6-8.
44. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 7.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
46. This point is established and later reiterated in discussions concerning indemnity for repairs of the Irish College. See CCI, Archives, Paris: Report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, Paris, to the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland for the year 1870-71, A2.b76 (McNamara, c. 1871).
47. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p.10.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 16-19.
50. *Ibid.*, *Déclaration du délégué aux relations extérieures*, A2.h87 (Pascal Grousset, 26 Apr. 1871).
51. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 19-20.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 21-26.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
55. *Ibid.*

56. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Paris Commune, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 30 May 1871), p. 31.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 31-2.
58. CCI, Archives, Paris: Report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, Paris for the year 1870-71, A2.b76 (McNamara, c. 1871).
59. *Ibid.*
60. CCI, Archives, Paris: Memoir of the Franco-Prussian war, A2.h87 (Ouin-la-Croix, 20 Feb. 1871), p. 3.
61. For financial reports of the Irish College during this period see C.C.I., Archives, Paris: Receipts and income of the Irish foundation, 1868-76, A2.b74; Annual reports of the Irish College, 1869-73, A2.b76; Reports of the *Compte au Trésor*, 1874-1900, A2.e88.
62. CCI, Archives, Paris: Meeting of the Irish Bishops Board, A2.c2 (20 Oct. 1872). For further information regarding the origins of the indemnity fund of the Irish College, see C.C.I., Old Achives, Paris: Claims of the Irish College, Paris, on the British Government in virtue of treaties with France, E4.a2 (Cork, J. Mahony and Sons, Printers, 1871).
63. CCI, Archives, Paris: Report of the Superior and Directors of the Irish College, Paris for the year 1870-71, A2.b76; *Annales de 1870-71*, A2.k1.
64. CCI, Archives, Paris: *Annales de 1873-4*, A2k1. Seven men sat on the *Bureau*: one member of the *Conseil d'État*, one member of the *Cour des Comptes*, one member of the *Cour de Cassation*, one representative of the Archbishop of Paris, two representatives nominated by the Minister of Public Instruction, and the Superior of the Irish College.
65. Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution*, p. 290.
66. Jules Simon wrote personally to Ouin-la-Croix explaining that his position had been eliminated. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.b66 (Simon to Ouin-la-Croix, 7 May 1873).
67. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.b74 (David Moriarty to *Ministre de l'Instruction Publique des Cultes et des Beaux Arts*, June 1873).
68. CCI, Archives, Paris: A2.b66 (Batbie to Moriarty, 17 June 1873).
69. *Ibid.* (Batbie to Ouin-la-Croix, 28 July 1873).
70. Annual report of the Irish College 1875-6, Thomas McNamara, 19 June 1876 (ICPA, A2.b111).

ABSTRACTS

The Irish College, Paris, was thrust into a new age following the Franco-Prussian war and subsequent downfall of the Second Empire. The autonomy and seclusion enjoyed by the ancient seminary was challenged following the foundation of the Third Republic. Efforts of successive French administrations to dictate College appointments, finances, attendance and undermine the influence of Irish bishops caused friction, but ultimately helped to modernise the College. This early transformation was intimately observed by Charles Ouin-la-Croix, the College Administrator. The memoirs he kept during the Franco-Prussian war, the siege of Paris and the

Paris Commune help to illustrate the locality of destruction in the Latin Quarter, as well as the collective charity which followed this civil unrest.

Le Collège des Irlandais à Paris fut projeté vers une époque nouvelle à la suite de la guerre franco-prussienne et de la chute du Second Empire que celle-ci précipita. L'autonomie et le relatif isolement dont avait pu jouir le séminaire furent remis en cause par l'avènement de la Troisième République. Les efforts d'administrations françaises successives pour imposer certains choix relatifs aux nominations, aux finances ou à la fréquentation au sein du Collège et pour saper l'influence des évêques irlandais provoquèrent des tensions, mais contribuèrent au bout du compte à la modernisation du Collège. Ces premières transformations furent observées de près par Charles Ouin-la-Croix, l'Administrateur du Collège. Le journal qu'il écrivit durant la guerre franco-prussienne, le siège de Paris et la Commune de Paris permet d'illustrer les aspects concrets et locaux de la destruction au sein du Quartier Latin, mais aussi l'élan de charité collective qui suivit ces temps d'agitation sociale.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Collège des Irlandais (Paris), diplomatie, relations franco-irlandaises

Keywords: Irish College (Paris), diplomacy, Franco-Irish relations

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