

Document 17.8 Joe English, "The Irish Volunteer Song" (1864)

Joe English was an Irishman and Civil War era music-hall composer and performer based in New York City. His song, about Irish Union soldiers, was written to the tune of "The Irish Jaunting Car," which was also the tune of the Confederate song "The Bonny Blue Flag." With its pride in Irish identity and imagery of Irish homeland, the song reflects the war's role in reinforcing immigrant identities. All-immigrant regiments exposed individuals to ethnic customs and languages, fostering a distinct cultural identity. As well, in response to discrimination and scape-goating during the war, immigrants defended and preserved their native languages and traditions.

*My name is Tim McDonald,
I'm a native of the Isle,
I was born among old Erin's bogs
When I was but a child.
My father fought in " 'Ninety-eight,"
for liberty so dear;
He fell upon old Vinegar Hill,
like an Irish volunteer.
Then raise the harp of Erin, boys,
the flag we all revere,
We'll fight and fall beneath its folds,
like Irish volunteers!*

*When I was driven from my home
by an oppressor's hand,
I cut my sticks and greased my brogues,
and came o'er to this land.
I found a home and many friends,
and some that I love dear;
Be jabbers! I'll stick to them like bricks
and an Irish volunteer.
Then fill your glasses up, my boys,
and drink a hearty cheer,
To the land of our adoption
and the Irish volunteer!*

*Now when the traitors in the south
commenced a warlike raid,
I quickly then laid down my hoe,
to the devil went my spade!
To a recruiting-office then I went,
that happened to be near,
And joined the good old "Sixty-ninth,"
like an Irish volunteer.
Then fill the ranks and march away!
No traitors do we fear;
We'll drive them all to blazes,
says the Irish volunteer.*

*Now if the traitors in the South
should ever cross our roads,
We'll drive them to the devil
as Saint Patrick did the toads;
We'll give them all short nooses*

*that come just below the ears,
Made strong and good of Irish hemp
by Irish volunteers.*

*Then here's to brave McClellan,
whom the army now reveres,
He'll lead us on to victory,
the Irish volunteers.*

*May Erin's Harp
and the Starry Flag
united ever be;
May traitors quake,
and rebels shake,
and tremble in their fears,
When next they meet the Yankee boys
and Irish volunteers!
God bless the name of Washington!
That name this land reveres;
Success to Meagher and Nugent,
and their Irish volunteers!*

Source: *Joe English's Irish and Comic Songster* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1864).