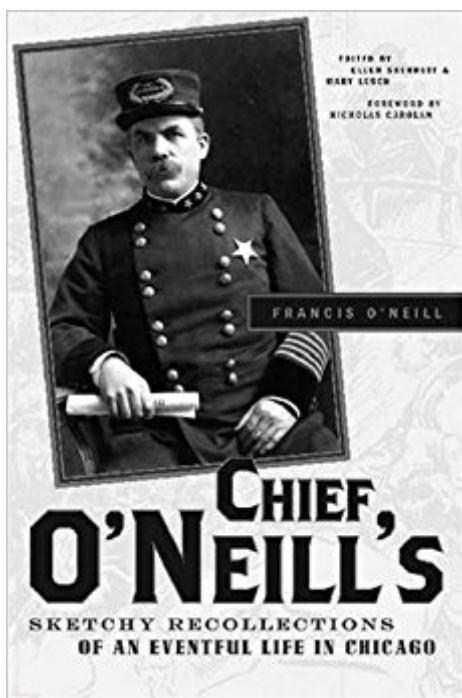


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# Chief O'Neill's Sketchy Recollections Of An Eventful Life In Chicago



## Synopsis

This remarkable memoir of immigration and assimilation provides a rare view of urban life in Chicago in the late 1800s by a newcomer to the city and the Midwest, and the nation as well. Francis O'Neill left Ireland in 1865. After five years traveling the world as a sailor, he and his family settled in Chicago just shortly before the Great Fire of 1871. As O'Neill looked back on his life, writing in Chicago at the age of 83, he could give first-hand accounts of Pullman strike of 1894, the railway strike of 1903, and the packinghouse strike of 1904. He could also reflect on the corruption that kept him, in spite of his innovations, extremely high exam scores, and performance, subject to powerful aldermen who prevented his advance as a member of the Chicago Police Department. Despite these obstacles, O'Neill eventually rose to be chief of police--a position from which he could enact much-needed civil service reform. In addition to his professional success, O'Neill is also remembered and beloved for his hobby, preserving traditional Irish music. O'Neill's story offers perspective on the inner workings of the police department at the turn of the twentieth century. His memoir also brings to life the challenges involved in succeeding in a new land, providing for his family, and integrating into a new culture. Francis O'Neill serves as a fine documentarian of the Irish immigrant experience in Chicago.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"O'Neill records so many encounters with the humble and the great that anyone researching Chicago history from 1871 through 1905 needs to consult this book. The depth of his thinking on

issues of his time is impressive, and issues such as political patronage reverberate today. . . . A truly remarkable life."Â --Gary Johnson, president, Chicago History MuseumÂ "Simple human joy, in music and in discovery, animate every page of the newly published memoirs he left behind. . . . Today he [O'Neill] is remembered with pride for his efforts on behalf of Irish traditional music, and this remarkable book gives us a rare glimpse at the extraordinary individual who undertook it."Â --Irish Voice"Anyone interested in Chicago's history as well as Irish music will profit from reading the life story of tough, effective, honorable, yet humble Chief Francis O'Neill."Â --Lawrence J. McCaffrey, professor of Irish history, emeritus, Loyola University of Chicago

Francis O'Neill was born to a farming family in County Cork in Ireland in 1848. He left home in 1865 and died a true Chicagoan in 1936. Mary Lesch is Francis O'Neill's great-granddaughter. She is now retired and divides her time between Chicago and Harbert, Michigan.Â Ellen Skerrett is currently writing a history of Loyola University Chicago. She is the co-author and editor of number of books on Catholicism and Chicago, including *At the Crossroads: Old Saint Patrick's and the Chicago Irish* (Wild Onion Books, 1997).Â

this an excellent book of anecdotes. i thought i was very knowledgable of chicago history; but, found out a lot about my own neighborhood. very easy reading.

Francis O'Neill (1848-1936) was born in Tralibane, Co. Cork, in the southwest of Ireland and, like many of his countrymen at that time, emigrated to the US where he eventually settled in Chicago and climbed through the ranks of the police department to become a highly regarded Superintendent of Police in 1901. Arguably, O'Neill is best remembered in the US, however, for having compiled several large collections of Irish traditional music, which he published in the early 1900s, and which have since become a standard reference for Irish musicians and Irish music lovers the world over. O'Neill wrote a couple of books about his musical hobby, and those who have been able to procure reprints of "Irish Folk Music - A Fascinating Hobby" and "Irish Minstrels and Musicians" will be familiar his wonderful prose and gift as a story-teller. Now comes "Chief O'Neill's Sketchy Recollections of an Eventful Life in Chicago" (Northwestern U Press, 2008), edited from a recently re-discovered manuscript by the most famous policeman in Irish music, where he writes in the same delightful style about his youth in Ireland, his adventures on the high seas, and his career in the Chicago police department. Those who have read Nicholas Carolan's excellent biography of O'Neill, "A Harvest Saved," will be familiar with some of the facts, but O'Neill's accounts, at times

charming, humorous, or gripping, and always thoroughly engrossing, are well worth rediscovering through O'Neill's own words.

After adventures on the high seas as a sailor, Francis O'Neill emigrated from Ireland to Chicago. Who could guess that this career police officer also would become a pivotal figure in music history by meticulously collecting and preserving traditional Irish music? With the publication of this book, O'Neill also will take his place as an observer of life in Chicago. O'Neill records so many encounters with the humble and the great that anyone researching Chicago history from 1871 through 1905 needs to consult this book. The depth of his thinking on issues of his time is impressive, and issues such as political patronage reverberate today. A truly remarkable life.

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