



# Chief O'Neill's Sketchy Recollections of an Eventful Life in Chicago

*Francis O'Neill*

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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.

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