

Ireland, however, mortality remained high, reaching a second peak in 1849, when a cholera epidemic provided the final, fatal blow to an already vulnerable people (Kinnealy, 1995).

From Kinnealy, Christine. *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52*. Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995. Used with permission.

Cecil Woodham-Smith, in *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-1849* (1992), also contends that the precise number of people who died during the famine will never be known.

In 1841 the population of Ireland was given as 8,175,124; in 1851, after the famine, it had dropped to 6,552,385 and the Census Commissioners calculated that, at the normal rate of increase, the total should have been 9,018,799, so that a loss of at least 2.5 million persons had taken place. The figures available, however, must be regarded as giving only a rough indication; vital statistics are unobtainable, no record was kept of deaths, and very many persons must have died and been buried unknown, as the fever victims died and were buried in West Cork, as bodies found lying dead on the road were buried in ditches, and as the timid people of Erris perished unrecorded (Woodham-Smith, 1992).

## Famine Scenes

A number of Irish and English newspapers covered the famine.

From the *Wexford Independent*:

Our accounts from the Northern parts of this country are most deplorable. What the poor people earn on public works is barely sufficient to support them. All their earnings go for food; and the consequence is, that they have nothing left to procure clothing. Since the extreme cold set in, sickness and death have accordingly followed in its train. Inflammation of the lungs, fevers and other maladies, resulting from excessive privation, have been bearing away their victims. Many have died in the course of last week; and the illness in every case was traceable to the want of clothing and firing, if not sufficient food.

-December 1846

Jeremiah O'Callaghan, in a letter to the editor of *The Cork Examiner*:

Sir — On entering the graveyard this day, my attention was arrested by two paupers who were engaged in digging a pit for the

purpose of burying their fellow paupers; they were employed in an old ditch. I asked why they were so circumscribed; the answer was “that green one you see on the other side is the property of Lord Bearhaven. His stewards have given us positive directions not to encroach on his property, and we have no alternative but this old ditch; here is where we bury our paupers.”

I measured the ground — it was exactly 40-feet square and contained, according to their calculation, 900 bodies. They then invited me to come and see a grave close by. I could scarcely endure the scene. The fragments of a corpse were exposed, in a manner revolting to humanity; the impression of a dog’s teeth was visible. The old clothes were all that remained to show where the corpse was laid.

-June 1847

Another letter to *The Cork Examiner*:

Each day brings with it its own horrors. The mind recoils from the contemplation of the scenes we are compelled to witness every hour. Ten inquests in Bantry — there should have been at least *two hundred* inquests. Each day — each hour produces its own victims — Holocausts offered at the shrine of political economy. Famine and pestilence are sweeping away hundreds — but they have *now* no terrors for the poor people. Their only regret seems to be that they are not relieved from their suffering and misery, by some process more speedy and less painful. As to holding any more inquests, it is mere nonsense. *The number of deaths is beyond counting.*

-January 1847

And from British journalist Alexander Somerville, who wrote his “Letters from Ireland during the Famine of 1847” for the *Manchester Examiner*:

I saw a man and his poor family, and truly might say, ‘God have mercy!’ They were skeletons, all of them, with skin on the bones and life within the skin. A mother skeleton and baby skeleton; a tall boy skeleton, who had no work to do; who could do nothing but eat and had nothing to eat. Four female children skeletons, and the tall father skeleton, not able to work to get food for them, and not able to get enough food when he did work for them. Their only food was what his wages of 10 d. per day would procure of ‘yellow meal’ — the meal of Indian corn. The price of that was 3s. per stone of 16 lb. This gave for the eight persons 26 lb. 10 oz. of meal for seven days; being about seven ounces and a half per day for each person. No self-control could make such persons distribute such a

starvation of food over seven days equally. Their natural cravings made them eat it up at once, or in one or three days at most, leaving the other days blank, making the pangs of hunger still worse.

## Emigration

Between 1845 and 1850, nearly one and a half million people emigrated from Ireland to America. According to Stephen Campbell in *The Great Irish Famine* (n.d.), "This was almost one-fifth of the country's pre-famine population and represented the largest single population movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1847 alone, 230,000 sailed to North America and Australia."

A number of newspapers reported on the mass exodus of the Irish. This account was taken from *The Cork Examiner*:

The quays are crowded every day with the peasantry from all quarters of the country, who are emigrating to America, both direct from this port, and 'cross channel' to Liverpool, as the agents here cannot produce enough ships to convey the people from this unhappy country. Two vessels — the Fagabelac and Coolock — were dispatched this week, the former with 208, the latter with 110 passengers. There are two other ships on the berth — the Wansworth for Quebec, and the Victory for New York; both are intended to sail on Tuesday next. There are nearly 1,200 passengers booked in these vessels.

-April 1847

Passenger Acts were passed to improve health and sanitary conditions on emigrant ships, but despite these measures, 40,000 died at sea or in quarantine stations.

From the *New York Sun*:

The paupers who have recently arrived from Europe give a most melancholy account of their sufferings. Upwards of 80 individuals, almost dead with ship fever, were landed from one ship alone, while 27 of the *cargo* died on the passage, and were thrown into the sea. They were 100 days tossing to and fro upon the ocean, and for the last 20 days their only food consisted of a few ounces of meal per day, and their only water was obtained from the clouds."

-May 1847

Emigration was seen as a solution to Ireland's chief social problem — too many poor. Some members of Parliament proposed transplanting the populations of certain areas to Canada and recolonizing the land with Protestant tenants. It was believed that Protestants would be more industrious and cooperative with their landlord.

Thousands died onboard 'coffin ships' during the Atlantic crossing. These were little more than rotting hulks, and their owners were plying a speculative trade. On the ocean voyage, the ships' crews protected themselves from cholera, which was rampant in Ireland, by nailing the ships' holds shut to keep the emigrants below the decks in crowded and unhealthy squalor. Based on Canadian statistics, typically 20 percent of the passengers died at sea, while another 20 percent arrived sick with fever, often so sick that they died within weeks. Hence the name 'coffin ships.' In 1847 there were 17,465 documented deaths. Thousands more died at disembarkation centers (Desmond, 1999).

From Desmond, Jerry. *Desmond's Concise History of Ireland*, 1999. Available from World Wide Web: <http://members.tripod.com/~jerrydesmond/index-2.html>  
Used with permission.

A May 1851 edition of *The Illustrated London News* summarized the depopulation of Ireland:

The Census Returns, when published, will enable us to ascertain, in some degree, the extent of the combined ravages of famine and pestilence, in the first place, and of despair and emigration, in the second, in the depopulation of Ireland. But even these returns, authentic as they will be, cannot be complete; for the emigration that has gone on since the census was taken, and which still continues, will compel the statist to make large deductions from the amount which the census will yield, if he wish to ascertain the real number of the Irish people. The annals of the modern world offer no such record as that presented in the history of Ireland, since the memorable and deplorable years of the potato famine, and of the pestilence that followed in its track. The splendid emigrant ships that ply between Liverpool and New York, and which have sufficed in previous years to carry to the shores of America an Irish emigration, amounting on the average to 250,000 souls per annum, have, during the present spring, been found insufficient to transport to the States the increasing swarms of Irish who have resolved to try in the New World to gain the independence which has been denied them in the old.

## Epilogue

For almost a century, the history of the Great Hunger was largely written by Irish nationalists. Later historians, in pursuit of 'objectivity,' saw such accounts as propaganda and tried to minimize the horrors of the Famine in their writings.

However, the Irish Famine was the greatest catastrophe of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. It began a process of depopulation, which transformed a rural landscape, and through death and emigration, decimated an entire class. A new consciousness of the Famine and its meaning in Irish history has arisen through the spectacle of worsening poverty, of millions of deaths still occurring throughout the world because of exploitation, indifference and the law of free-market (Campbell, 1994).

From Campbell, Stephen J. *The Great Irish Famine: Words and Images from the Famine Museum, Strokestown Park, County Roscommon*. Minneapolis, MN: Irish Books and Media, 1994.  
Used with permission.

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## SECTION FOUR: INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

### EARLY ELEMENTARY

#### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (3)

**Historical Themes:** Students will apply their understanding of historical periods, issues and trends to examine such historical themes as ideals, beliefs and institutions; conflict and conflict resolution; human movement and interaction; and science and technology in order to understand how the world came to be the way it is.

**Human Systems:** Students will interpret spatial patterns of human migration, economic activities and political units in Connecticut, the nation and the world.

- Review with students how and why Irish Catholics came to immigrate to the United States following the Great Hunger, using language and events appropriate to a student's age and understanding. Help them develop an image and to empathize with the conditions facing the Irish people that caused them to emigrate.
- Introduce students to the concept of "refugees" from political and economic persecution, focusing on refugee families and children. Focus on the concepts of good and evil, fairness and powerlessness.

### UPPER ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

#### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (1)

**Historical Thinking:** Students will develop historical thinking skills, including chronological thinking and recognizing change over time; contextualizing, comprehending and analyzing historical literature; researching historical sources; understanding the concept of historical causation; understanding competing narratives and interpretation; and constructing narratives and interpretation.

- Have students examine data on the Great Hunger to determine the adequacy and sufficiency of evidence, point of view, historical context, bias, distortion and propaganda, and to distinguish fact from opinion. Then discuss how the Irish and English newspapers described the famine. Was there evidence of bias? Were events recorded fairly? Was there enough evidence at the time to form an opinion?

- Have students gather information on the famine from multiple sources, including archives or electronic databases, to have experience with historical sources and to appreciate the need for multiple perspectives. Discuss their findings.

## HIGH SCHOOL

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (1)

**Historical Thinking:** Students will develop historical thinking skills, including chronological thinking and recognizing change over time; contextualizing, comprehending and analyzing historical literature; researching historical sources; understanding the concept of historical causation; understanding competing narratives and interpretation; and constructing narratives and interpretation.

**Applying History:** Students will recognize the continuing importance of historical thinking and historical knowledge in their own lives and in the world in which they live.

- Ask students to formulate historical questions and hypotheses on the Great Hunger from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources. How accurate were the English and Irish newspaper accounts of the famine? How did historians depict the Irish? Were the English people fully aware of Ireland's blight during the Great Hunger? Did relief efforts prove effective? What else could have been done?
- Discuss the concept of empathy and, in particular, empathy for the Irish who lived during the Great Hunger. Ask students to write a short narrative on what they imagine it was like during the famine. What would it be like to lose your primary food source? Eviction from your home? To be hungry and see loved ones die of starvation and/or sickness? Has something like this occurred in other parts of the world?





## **SECTION FIVE**

### **New World Challenges**

#### **Introduction**

“The tide for emigration knows no limits,” said one newspaper of the headlong flight of Irish people from their native land during the Famine. The rage, in fact, was no more than the instinct for survival. To remain in Ireland was to starve; to leave for wherever and under whatever circumstances was to seize an opportunity to live.

(Neil Hogan, 1998)

#### **The Tide Of Emigration**

Irish exploration and settlement of North America and the West Indies began long before the Great Famine. Irish legend and some archaeological evidence suggests that Irish monks and fishermen landed in North America at least as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Historical documents show that Irish fishermen established camps along the Atlantic coastline of the New England colonies and Canada by the 16<sup>th</sup> century. From the time of the Protestant Reformation until the Great Hunger, Irish Catholics immigrated to the colonies, often as exiles, from uprisings against the English or from evictions from their lands. Some came as slaves, many came as indentured servants. Still others chose to come for new opportunities and religious freedom, bringing with them skills and funds to begin new lives.

The immigrant Irish, like those who remained at home, found their faith a barrier to full acceptance in the English colonies and New Republic. Although the Irish contributed significantly to the colonial economy as farmers and tradesmen, and proved to be loyal patriots and steadfast soldiers during the American Revolution, their Catholic beliefs and practices kept them outsiders in the New World, where Protestantism was the established religion. Except for Maryland Colony, which was established by Catholic colonists from England and Ireland, Catholics were not allowed to practice their religion. However, Catholicism was eventually repressed in Maryland until after the American Revolution. As outcasts, the Irish Catholics formed fraternal and secret societies where they could express their cultural and religious beliefs, provide aid and comfort to new immigrants and send support to Ireland for resistance against the English occupation. In Connecticut, the Congregational Church was the established religion until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ireland's Great Hunger occurred at a time of robust expansion in the United States — laborers of every sort were needed — and the destitute Irish found work in every region of the country. Irish men, often arriving as bachelors without means, built canals, roads, bridges, railroads, city water and sewer systems, tenements, middle class neighborhoods, shops and business establishments. They mined iron, copper, silver and gold. They worked on farms, in factories and in mills. Young, unmarried Irish women worked as domestics to the growing middle class and worked in the thread mills of New England. Wherever they found work, they settled together in neighborhoods, often with family and friends from Ireland, recreating the cultural life they had left behind.

The extraordinary numbers of Irish immigrants during and after the Great Hunger fueled resistance among white Protestants. Established Protestant communities in America feared that Irish Catholics would flood the labor market and erode their cultural and racial control. They also feared the Irish pattern of organizing into fraternal societies, such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and trade unions. As they became citizens, most Irish registered as Democrats. The Know-Nothing Party was formed to resist non-Protestant immigration and further loss of voter control and social and economic status. Prior to the Civil War, the Know-Nothings supported the Republican Party and in the state governments they controlled, enacted legislation similar to the repressive penal laws in Ireland. In Connecticut, the leader of the Know-Nothing Party, William T. Minor, was elected Governor on the eve of the Civil War.

The American Civil War was a turning point for Irish immigrants. Northern states, seeking to raise armies, recruited them into state militia units as soon as they disembarked at New York and other ports. Because many could not speak English, they formed their own units, led by Irish officers, and were often assigned the most dangerous positions in battle. The death toll among Irish soldiers was extremely high. Because of the demonstrated valor and patriotism in the Civil War, the Irish began to become accepted into American society, and their status and fortunes improved. As the nation expanded westward, the Civil War created a second wave of economic growth — especially in manufacturing and industry — thus creating new labor markets for the immigrants. Although Irish Catholics would continue to be victims of religious and cultural prejudice for another 100 years, a second generation of Irish were being born in the United States, and more Irish families were entering the middle classes.

## **Connecticut's Irish Communities**

The experience of Irish immigrants in Connecticut paralleled their experiences in the English colonies and United States. Many Protestant Irish chose Connecticut, as well as the other colonies, for their destination. Although their Presbyterian religious practices did not always sit well with New England's Congregationalists,

they soon established themselves as merchants, tradesmen, professionals and manufacturers and assimilated into the dominant society.

The earliest colonial records of New England document the presence of Irish Catholic immigrants. In Connecticut Colony, Irish immigrants were heavily involved in the maritime trade between the North American and West Indies colonies, often functioning as ship's captains, first mates, stewards and common sailors.

Some Irish Catholic refugees came directly to the Connecticut Colony, but many more found their way to Connecticut from New Boston, the West Indies and New York. They brought with them valuable skills, including farming, fishing, navigation, spinning and weaving.

During the American Revolution, Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull discovered that his state's Irish Catholics were more patriotic than other recruits. The Irish distinguished themselves in the Navy and on the battlefield.

During the first half of the 19th century, independence made little difference to the socioeconomic circumstances of the Irish Catholics. Because they had no monetary value, their worth — as well as that of other foreigners — was less than that of the African slaves. They were an expendable labor force which took the most dangerous, low paying and itinerant jobs. They lived in squalor and were discriminated against.

Despite living in a free country, Irish Catholics were forbidden to publicly practice their religion. However, because of a Catholic bishop's visit to Hartford in 1823, Connecticut's General Assembly allowed a Roman Catholic mass to be celebrated in the city's Old State House. The state's first Catholic Church was Hartford's Holy Trinity, which opened in 1829.

From 1845 to 1855, Ireland's Great Hunger precipitated an enormous increase in Irish Catholic immigration to Connecticut. By 1860, in cities such as Hartford and New Haven, Irish Catholics represented about 20 to 30 percent of the population. The impact was similar to what Irish exiles experienced in other places. The increase in immigration strengthened ties within Connecticut's Irish communities and there was a dramatic increase in the number of parish churches in Connecticut's industrial and manufacturing cities, like Stamford, New Haven, Meriden, Waterbury and Hartford. During this period, Irish workers were used for Connecticut's expanding railroad and canal network, and its expanding manufacturing enterprises. With the assistance of Irish missionary societies, such as the Sisters of Mercy, they soon attached parochial schools, orphanages and cemeteries to their neighborhood churches. Connecticut's Irish Catholics joined fraternal societies, such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and fostered trade unionism in their work places.

The dramatic increase in immigration, however, also precipitated a nativist backlash in Connecticut and elsewhere. The Know-Nothing political party was strong in Connecticut, and its anti-immigrant beliefs often were promoted in the state's prominent newspapers, such as the *Hartford Courant*. The party's constitution stated that, "Its object shall be to resist the insidious policies of the Church of Rome, and all foreign influences against the institutions of this country, by placing in all offices the gift of the people, whether by election or appointment, none but native-born Protestant citizens." In the 1856 elections, the Republican Party accused the Democratic Party, to which most Irish Catholics belonged, of being the party of "rum, Romanism and slavery." William T. Minor, a leader in the Know-Nothing Party was elected Governor of Connecticut.

Irish Catholic immigrants were attracted to Hartford for many reasons. Hartford was a transportation hub; steamboats brought world trade to the port of Hartford, then railroads and canals moved goods from Hartford's wharves and warehouses into New England's interior. Connecticut's manufactured goods — woolens, cottons and silk, armaments, machine tools and farm implements — were shipped throughout the United States and abroad.

Northeast of the Old State House, Hartford's Irish immigrants settled in an area known by its detractors as "Pigsville." Bordered on the west by Main Street and on the east by the Connecticut River, the neighborhood included everything necessary to sustain itself. Along Front Street, Irish-owned businesses like Nick Gallagher's bakery, Mrs. Murphy's grocery and Kelley and Bros. butcher shop depended on their countrymen's patronage to survive. The neighborhood also included beer halls, social clubs, theaters and firehouses. Trinity Church, however, was the center of the community, and the Catholic priests not only ministered to the spiritual needs of their parishioners, but also functioned as social workers and go-betweens to non-Irish politicians, civil servants and businessmen.

Housing in Pigsville was the worst in Hartford — old wooden structures in destitute condition. A laborer might earn \$1 per day and rent rooms for his family at \$10 per month. Often, several families lived in one rented house or apartment. When an Irish family's circumstances improved, its living quarters were passed on to newly arrived immigrants.

As they had done in their homeland, Hartford's Irish immigrants formed societies to protect their interests and minister to the needs of their community. In Pigsville, the St. Patrick's Society and St. John's Sick and Burial Society sponsored picnics, dinners and dances to pay for providing the community with health and life insurance, and a loan program.

As the Irish population grew and more openly expressed religious and social customs, prejudice became more overt. The close-knit character of the Irish neighborhood, their Roman Catholic religion, their ties to home and their

secret societies all contributed to the suspicion and prejudice of Hartford's predominantly white Congregational population.

Outsiders were convinced the saloons and social clubs were fronts for illegal trafficking in alcohol, and armaments to liberate their homeland. By the time of the Civil War, and influenced by the Know-Nothing Party, Connecticut's government forbade the Irish to form militia groups or own church property in common. The *Hartford Courant* encouraged anti-Irish sentiment, portraying the Irish in Hartford as a separate, subhuman race.

## **The Irish Brigade**

Prior to the Civil War, Irish immigrants and other patriotic groups joined state militia organizations in assisting state and federal governments during the conflict. Elected on the Know-Nothing ticket of 1855, Connecticut's Governor Minor disbanded all militia organizations with foreign-born troops. Six years later, as the nation erupted in Civil War, Minor's bad judgment became evident. Governor William Buckingham, a moderate Republican, realized that the disbanded Irish militia groups offered the best source of trained troops for the Federal army. The Irish community, however, refused to raise its militia again until Minor's statute was taken off the books.

Although Irish immigrants did enlist in many military units of the North's Grand Army of the Potomac, they preferred to form their own units with Irish officers in command. One of the best-known units was the Irish Brigade, led by Thomas Meagher of New York City. Irish immigrants from New York, Massachusetts and areas of Connecticut served in the Brigade, often facing some of the fiercest fighting of the Civil War — at times against their Irish compatriots living in the South. In Ireland, Meagher led uprisings against the English and was sentenced to exile in Tasmania, from which he escaped. He saw the Irish Brigade as an army which could liberate Ireland after the war.

The Irish Brigade's most notable engagement with the Confederacy occurred at Antietam in Maryland on September 17, 1862. There, Meagher threw the Brigade against the Confederate Army to halt their progress until additional Northern troops could be brought to the field. At that site, later known as "the bloody land," the Brigade, carrying its Irish flag into combat, suffered dreadful losses. That day was the bloodiest of the Civil War. Twenty-two thousand soldiers were killed or wounded. The Irish Brigade's losses were higher than any other unit — 540 casualties, or 60 percent of their complement. On October 25, 1997, the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service made the only exception to its policy of not placing new monuments on Civil War battlefield sites. A monument to the Irish Brigade was placed at the Bloody Lane on the Antietam Battlefield.

Connecticut's General Assembly overturned Governor Minor's prohibition against the Irish militia. Governor William Buckingham authorized the outlawed Emmet Guards of New Haven to form an Irish Regiment in 1861, which became the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry.

As with Meager's Irish Brigade, Irish nationalism was as much a motivator as Northern idealism. Connecticut's 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment served gallantly in the Battle of Baton Rouge and later in Shenandoah, Virginia, its flag and military ceremonies celebrating the Irish heritage of its soldiers. In fact, the 9<sup>th</sup> regimental flag, replete with an Irish harp and motto "Erin go Bragh" ("Ireland Forever"), is on display in the Hall of the Flags in the Capitol Building in Hartford. The distribution of Congressional Medals of Honor to Irish in the Civil War was extremely high.

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# SECTION FIVE INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

## EARLY ELEMENTARY

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: Geography (9 and 11)

**Places and Regions:** Students will use spatial perspective to identify and analyze the significance of physical and cultural characteristics of places and world regions.

**Human Systems:** Students will interpret spatial patterns of human migration, economic activities and political units in Connecticut, the nation and the world.

- Review with students how Irish immigrants created neighborhoods and communities that were self-sufficient. Explore with them why the Irish had to be self-sufficient.
- Make a list with students of all the places their families went within the last week to shop, for entertainment, education, recreation, socialization, to attend church, etc.
- Ask students to draw a circle on a piece of paper and to place their home in the middle. The circle should represent the farthestmost points of the places they visited last week — school, grocery store, library, skating rink, etc.
- Ask students to draw a circle within the circle indicating how far they and their families would be able to walk. How many of the places they visited would be within this inner circle? How many would be outside? How did they get to the places beyond walking distance?
- Ask students to imagine that they, like many of their ancestors and immigrant Irish, are living in an era when there were no cars or public transportation. Working in groups, ask them to design a neighborhood (consisting of all the places they need or want to visit) within walking distance of their homes. Where would the school be? The grocery store? Students might either draw these on a piece of paper or cut out shapes representing schools, churches, stores, etc., that could be moved about.
- Have students consider how the idea of a neighborhood has changed and why. Do they think it is good or bad that we no longer live in neighborhoods in which everything we have is within walking distance?

## UPPER ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (4) and Economics (13)

**Places and Regions:** Students will recognize the continuing importance of historical thinking and historical knowledge in their own lives and in the world in which they live.

**Limited Resources:** Students will demonstrate that because human, natural and capital resources are limited, individuals, households, businesses and governments must make choices.

- Provide students with the “Help Wanted” section of several newspapers. Working in groups, have students develop a grid listing 10 jobs and the education, skills, tools, etc., needed to get those jobs. How many students (discounting age) found 10 jobs they qualified for? What were the salaries? What were the hours? Have the students research criteria for “poverty level” family income. Would they be living above or below the poverty level if they took these jobs?
- Ask students to get a copy of the “Help Wanted” section of their local paper and search for five jobs they would really like to do. What education, skills, tools or mobility would they need? Compared to their previous list of jobs, would the working conditions be better? Would the salary be better? Ask each student to write a career plan for becoming qualified for one of these jobs. What is the cost of preparing for a job they would like? How can they make it happen?
- Review with students what many immigrant groups, especially the Irish, experienced when arriving in the United States in the 1800s. Make a list of their education, skills, tools and mobility. Which job categories do they think most of these immigrants would qualify for?
- Have students analyze the measures taken by immigrant groups to qualify for jobs they wanted. How long did it take? Did it happen in one generation? Students now should be able to write a thesis statement about “upward mobility” of immigrant groups.



## HIGH SCHOOL

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (3) and Civics and Government (6)

**Historical Themes:** Students will apply their understanding of historical periods, issues and trends to examine such historical themes as ideals, beliefs and institutions; conflict and conflict resolution; human movement and interaction; and science and technology in order to understand how the world came to be the way it is.

**Rights and Citizen Responsibilities:** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in and shape public policy, and contribute to the maintenance of our democratic way of life.

- Ask students to research U.S. history and make a list of political groups and organizations (such as the Know-Nothings, Ku Klux Klan, McCarthyism, etc.) which sought to limit foreign or ethnic influence on U.S. political, economic and social life.
- After reporting their findings, have students describe the characteristics and fears of each group or organization, such as the fear of losing democratic institutions, fear of losing economic control, fear of other races and cultures.
- Explore with students, the concept that although the ethnic and cultural groups may change — Irish, Jews, Blacks, etc. — the issues remain the same.
- How have minority groups overcome the suspicion and prejudice of the dominant cultural group? Political power, education, economic and social status? From their research and discussion, have students develop hypotheses about why the dominant cultural group develops a fear of foreign influence, and how minority cultural groups achieve acceptance by the dominant group?



# SECTION SIX

## The Irish In America

### Introduction

Up and down the Atlantic coast of North America in the late 1840s and early 1850s, ships discharged hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Irish Famine. Most of them came to the United States after 1847. Impoverished and debilitated, some died in quarantine stations and were buried in unmarked graves far from the land of their birth. Many remained in port cities like Boston, New York and New Orleans despite admonitions from travel guides and newspapers about the dangers of city life for Irish emigrants. Others found their way inland along rivers, canals and railways to large and small communities where fathers, brothers or sisters awaited their arrival and where they added to the rapidly growing Irish presence.

(Neil Hogan, 1998)

### Emigrants' Legacy

Although their numbers decreased, Irish immigrants continued to enter the United States in significant numbers between 1860 and 1900. This third wave was less destitute than the first and had the benefit of established Irish communities in most regions of the country.

The Irish settled on farms, migrated across the country for construction and mining projects, joined the merchant marines or stayed in the Army. But the majority settled in the great industrial cities of the East and Midwest, such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. These and other cities were exploding centers of commerce, industry and manufacturing, with rapidly growing immigrant populations. Soon, many municipalities were no longer controlled by the white Protestant financial leaders. Instead, the immigrant groups, organized by the Democratic Party, gained control of neighborhood governments. Before long, the Irish, with a longer tenure in the United States, better command of the English language and a genius for politics, succeeded in controlling a number of city governments. Politics became another ladder to achieve social mobility.

To hold onto their culture and religion — while still participating in the upward mobility offered in American society — the Irish Catholics established neighborhood schools, churches, hospitals and universities, and formed societies to advance their social and economic status. Parochial schools and Catholic colleges and universities assured that second-generation Irish received a good education and religious training. Organizations such as the Ancient Order of

Hibernians and the Knights of Columbus provided fellowship and access to economic and political power.

Working class Irish immigrants continued to experience prejudice and exploitation in the labor market, often receiving the worst jobs for the worst pay. Adept at forming secret societies and trade unions in Ireland, they were at the forefront of the labor union movement by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. “No Irish Need Apply” was a phrase commonly found in newspaper “Help Wanted” ads and shop windows. Distrust of the Irish Catholics stemmed from a perceived allegiance to Rome and a belief that Irish workers were lazy, dirty and of poor morals.

By the end of World War I, the Irish were firmly established citizens. Irish Catholic Americans, however, continued to have a passionate attachment to the fate of Catholics in their homeland. They supported Irish separatism from England by lobbying the United States government and forming organizations to support Irish resistance against English occupation. They were gravely disappointed that the Allies’ victory did not result in a free, united Ireland.

World War II was a turning point for Irish-Americans. Serving in military units with young men and women from all races, ethnic groups and cultures, they (like many immigrant groups) again demonstrated lasting patriotic bonds with the United States. Immigrants were among the most decorated heroes of the war, seeing themselves first as Americans, and then as Irish, Polish, Italian or Hispanic. In fact, Irish-American Audie Murphy was the most decorated U.S. soldier in World War II. Like all World War II veterans, Irish-Americans enjoyed the benefits of having served their nation — education, housing and jobs — all which accelerated their upward mobility.

The election of second-generation Irish-American Robert A. Hurley in 1940 as Connecticut’s first Catholic Governor was evidence of the changing social order in our state. Hurley, a New Deal Democrat from Bridgeport, developed a national reputation as an opponent of racial and other discrimination.

## **Educational Challenges**

For many Irish immigrants, a significant barrier to social and economic mobility was a lack of language skills. Most spoke a dialect that was more Gaelic than English, and many could not read or write. As tenant farmers in Ireland, their knowledge of commerce and finances was limited.

Their religious practices and cultural traditions also prevented them from assimilating into the dominant society. Public and private schools in New England reflected the established Congregational religion and many were openly

hostile to Roman Catholics. Thus, many Irish Catholics were not in a social or economic position to take advantage of the schools attended by Protestants.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Catholic churches gradually increased and parish priests, realizing they must provide basic economic and social support, established missionary societies and schools. Concerned that American-born Irish Catholic children might be secularized by the dominant Protestant culture, priests requested help from missionary societies in Ireland and Europe. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, many parochial schools had opened in Irish Catholic neighborhoods.

In 1834, the first Catholic school in Connecticut was opened in the sacristy of Christ Church in New Haven's Irish community. Known as St. Mary's School, students were shuffled from church sacristy to private homes, until a proper building could be purchased.

Until 1852, lay educators, recognized and praised by Connecticut's educational community for academic excellence and pedagogical techniques, ran the school. Separate classes were conducted for boys and girls. Eventually, the Sisters of Mercy, a missionary order from Ireland, assumed responsibility for the girls' school and, by 1875, the sisters ran the entire school.

By the 1860s, there were parochial schools scattered throughout Connecticut: St. John's in Middletown, St. Mary's in New Britain, St. Patrick's in New Haven, St. Peter's in Danbury, St. Patrick's in New London, Holy Trinity in Wallingford, St. Rose's in Meriden and so on. The Sisters of Mercy operated some of these schools, while others were operated with lay instructors or other religious societies.

In Hartford, the Sisters of Mercy established a school in St. Patrick's parish in 1852. It later became St. Catherine's Academy for Girls. When the Academy moved out of the parish, it was renamed St. Joseph's Seminary. By 1932, it had evolved into St. Joseph's Junior College for Women, and today is known as St. Joseph's College, a nationally recognized undergraduate liberal arts college.

Good parochial schools and excellent colleges and universities led third- and fourth-generation Irish graduates into professional careers and government work. By the 1960s, many city, state and federal leaders came from the Irish community. Irish executives managed major financial institutions, industrial corporations and commercial enterprises.

## **The Present**

While some Irish neighborhoods continue to exist and Irish cultural pride remains strong, Irish-Americans were generally mainstreamed by the 1970s. Today, Irish-Americans — although still gathering at social clubs and for religious services — belong to differing political parties and hold diverse opinions on social and economic policy. They continue however, to have strong ties to the motherland, and remain vigilant in their commitment to the unification of an independent Ireland.

Descendants of the floods of Irish escaping the Great Hunger are now entrenched members of the American society. Their contributions to American culture cannot be denied. These individuals not only contributed their blood and muscle to building America — by providing care for middle class families, building roads, churches, schools and hospitals — many have become giants in American literature, theater, the arts, music sports, politics and intellectual life. Very much like those ancient monasteries, the Irish cultural memory continues to infuse and regenerate American and world culture.

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# SECTION SIX INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

## EARLY ELEMENTARY

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (4) and Economics (15)

**Applying History:** Students will recognize the continuing importance of historical thinking and historical knowledge in their own lives and in the world in which they live.

**Economic Interdependence:** Students will demonstrate how the exchange of goods and services by individuals, groups and nations creates economic interdependence and how trade results in change.

- Bring in the “Help Wanted” ads from a newspaper and read a number of these to students. Teachers might also bring in the *Yellow Pages* to give students an idea of the kinds of work, people do.
- Ask students to draw pictures of themselves doing work they would like to do.
- Discuss with students the kind of training needed for the work they would like to do. Help students focus on the language, math and artistic skills required. Explore with students how they might gain these skills.
- If possible, plan a field trip to a work place and have workers tell students about what they do and the training required. Workers might also visit the school and bring pictures of their workplace and discuss training.

## UPPER ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: History (1 and 4)

**Historical Thinking:** Students will develop historical thinking skills, including chronological thinking and recognizing change over time; contextualizing, comprehending and analyzing historical literature; researching historical sources; understanding the concept of historical causation; understanding competing narratives and interpretation; and constructing narratives and interpretation.

**Applying History:** Students will recognize the continuing importance of historical thinking and historical knowledge in their lives and in the world in which they live.

- Invite a colleague from the school or a church or civic organization and interview him or her. Then work with the class to decide what should be included in that individual's biography and why.
- Ask students to interview a mature family member or friend and prepare a biography of that person. Students can share their biographies, critique them and put them in a class scrapbook. If possible, include photographs or other memorabilia.

## HIGH SCHOOL

### CSDE Social Studies Standards: Civics and Government (6 and 8)

***Citizen Rights and Responsibilities:*** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in and shape public policy, and contribute to the maintenance of our democratic way of life.

***International Relations:*** Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the major elements of international relations and world affairs affect their lives and the security and well-being of their community, state and nation.

- Discuss with students the concept of the "hyphenated" American — Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Spanish-Americans, etc. Then explore with students why people like to remember and talk about their cultural identities.
- Ask students to consider how maintaining cultural diversity strengthens or weakens American society. Have them research differences between the cultural diversity in the United States, for example, with nations that are culturally homogenous (Japan or Korea, etc.). Does diversity have a role in protecting Americans against tyranny and dictatorship? Does it have a role in protecting America against mass hysteria and xenophobia?
- Explore with students why it is important to know about other people's cultures, such as the culture of the Irish. What new perspectives on history and society can come from learning about other cultures?



# TEACHER RESOURCES

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### **Films/Videos/Slides**

- Celtic Video, Inc. *When Ireland Starved*. New York: Radharc Films Production.
- Connecticut Historical Society. *A Culture Transplanted: The Irish in Connecticut* (slide presentation). Hartford, CT 1985.

# INTERNET RESOURCES

## **Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, Inc.**

[www.aoh.com](http://www.aoh.com)

Information on the world's largest Irish Catholic fraternal organization. Links to chapters in other states, including Connecticut. Also links to Irish cultural and historical sites.

## **Cyndis List of Irish Genealogy Sites on the Internet**

[www.Cyndislist.com/ireland.htm](http://www.Cyndislist.com/ireland.htm)

Extensive links to Irish-related sites; beyond genealogy; including history, music, literature, Gaelic studies, etc.

## **Irish Archaeology on the Net**

[www.xs4all.nl/~tbreen/links.html](http://www.xs4all.nl/~tbreen/links.html)

A guide to archaeological sites throughout Ireland. Research, history and volunteer opportunities are listed.

## **Irish Family History Foundation**

[www.Mayo-Ireland.ie/Roots.htm](http://www.Mayo-Ireland.ie/Roots.htm)

Direct access to Irish-related archives and records that have been placed on the web throughout Ireland. Included are famine ship records, land records and census data.

## **Irish History Sites on the Web**

[www.VMS.uTexas.edu/~jdana/irehist.html](http://www.VMS.uTexas.edu/~jdana/irehist.html)

Extensive links to Irish-related historical websites. Topics range from Unionist history, Republican history, Irish time lines, famine history and suggested reading lists.

## **The Irish Times Newspaper**

[www.Irishtimes.com](http://www.Irishtimes.com)

Access to Ireland's largest newspaper; up-to-date news, weather, editorials and an archive service to stories run in the newspaper during the previous two years.

## **Mega Links Cultural Page**

<http://ic.net/~erasmusRaz30.htm#irishamericans>

Links to all topics Irish; including history, culture, music, travel and geography. Very extensive list of links.

**New Jersey Irish Famine Curriculum**

[www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education)

Teacher and student summary of the Irish Famine. Six study units to guide classroom instruction created in 1996.

**ERIC: Education Resources Information Center**

<http://ericir.syr.edu>

Although ERIC does not list curriculum materials exclusively on the Irish or the Great Famine, it does list a number of curriculums on multicultural education and cultural diversity that include information on Irish Americans.

## CONNECTICUT RESOURCES

The Ancient Order of Hibernians  
319 Chamberlain Highway  
Meriden CT 06450

Irish-American Unity Conference  
351A Boston Post Road  
East Lyme, CT 06333-1551

Irish-American Historical Society  
P.O. Box 120-020  
East Haven, CT 06512

Irish-American Home Society  
132 Commerce Street  
Glastonbury, CT 06033

The Wild Geese, Inc.  
P.O. Box 11088, 21 Nutmeg Drive  
Greenwich CT 06830

Irish-American Community Center  
Venice Place  
East Haven CT 06512

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