

## IRISH MIGRANTS TO AMERICA

The Irish had been leaving their homeland for America as early as the 17th Century, but one of the greatest waves of migration began in 1715 when most people entered America via the port of Boston. These were mainly Protestant peasant land workers fleeing poverty and the discrimination that the English Penal Law imposed on them as dissenters. They were also suffering from a succession of poor harvests, droughts and escalating rents demanded by the Anglican Church. Their numbers increased noticeably up until 1750.

From 1750 until 1775 most Ulster immigrants entered the USA via Philadelphia, Baltimore and Charlestown moving to the mid-Atlantic area in search of land and employment opportunities, where there was less religious hostility. Many of these immigrants were illiterate, only spoke Irish and could not understand English.

Peak migration was at the time of the Potato Famine between 1845 and 1852 when it is estimated that 2 million left Ireland because there was starvation and inadequate help from the British Government. Again Boston was the main immigration hub. While the original immigrants had been Presbyterian and Protestant these were mainly Catholic. The other point of entry was New York. Others came over the border from Canada. A ticket for the ocean crossing was cheaper to Canada.

By 1880 single Irish women represented half of all immigrants arriving in the US. Most went into domestic service where food, lodgings and clothing was provided. Most male immigrants were labourers. They were accepted for menial work while the American economy was strong but in the less good times, were accused of taking jobs from the Americans. Job adverts often said 'No Irish need apply'

During the American Civil War 1861-5, thousands of immigrants participated. They made up the majority of no less than 40 Union regiments. The result of this was that they were generally more respected and second and third generation Irish moved up the social ladder and gained more acceptable jobs eg. in the police and fire services.

Migration to the US declined during WW1 but reached another peak between 1921 and 1923 followed by a decline, due to the international depression and the introduction of US restrictions on migrant members.

Some Statistics.

Since 1820 6 million Irish have migrated to the US.

Between 1856 and 1921 half of all Irish immigrants were female.

In 1892 Ellis Island opened.

The most Irish State is New Hampshire, where they represent 20.2% of the population

Hawaii is the least with only 4.3% being Irish.