AWESOME stories

THE CRISIS DEEPENS

After Irish people arrived in America, following all they'd been through in their own country because of the Potato Famine, they faced anti-immigrant sentiments in America. This image depicts "The Day We Celebrate: St. Patrick's Day, 1867," which Thomas Nast published in the April 6, 1867 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. Online via the Library of Congress.

Death had descended on the Emerald Isle.

People everywhere were dying. By January 18, 1847, an eyewitness reported reported there were unattended bodies by the roadside and in homes. Surviving family members had neither the strength nor the money to care for their deceased loved ones. Some people were dead as long as eleven days before they were buried.

So many people died that the coroners were overwhelmed. Burdened beyond their capacity, they stopped holding inquests for people who died in the streets. Funerals, when they were held, had few mourners. People weren't strong enough to attend.

There wasn't enough wood to make coffins. Undertakers developed coffins with sliding bottoms so they could be reused after people were buried in mass graves. Later, the Sliding Cross Memorial was made from one of those temporary boxes.

Mothers who had no food to give their children gave them seaweed. (Evidence of that was found in the autopsy of a 2-year-old girl.) Ireland, the beautiful country with some of the best farm land in the world, had become a place that was littered with bodies and abandoned villages.

Many who survived the initial onslaught of famine and desperation had one thought: Leave the country. Within four years, more than 1 million people did just that.

Leaving the country, however, was not so simple. Where would people go? Not to any shore connected with Britain - except to board a ship. Liverpool, for example, became the starting point for long journeys on overcrowded ships.

Many people did not survive the Atlantic crossing. "Famine Ships" became "Coffin Ships." By the time the vessels arrived at Boston or New York City, they were less crowded than they had been at Liverpool.

For those who made it, however, the first night in America was better than the last night in Ireland. At least families had a roof over their heads.

Still, arrival in America meant more hardship for many Irish immigrants. Most were Catholics - and Catholics weren't always welcomed into American cities at the time.

Anti-immigrant sentiment was strong in 19th century America. Thomas Nast, the famous cartoonist, depicted St. Patrick's Day of 1867 in a way that would be scandalously offensive today. Even Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, had anti-Catholic riots.

By the time the most damaging effects of the Great Hunger were over, Ireland's population had dropped from about 8 million (at its highest-ever level in 1845) to about 5 million. It has never recovered from that massive

decline.
Many Irish people must have thought: "Surely *we* can govern the country much better than *this* !"

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-CRISIS-DEEPENS-Wind-that-Shakes-the-Barley

Media Stream

Irish Emigre - As I Was

Image, described above, from *Work & Wages; or, the Penny Emigrant's Guide to the United States and Canada, for Female Servants, Laborers, Mechanics, Farmers*, Etc., Fifth edition, by Vere Foster. Published in London, by W. And F.G. Cash, during 1855.

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Irish Emigre - As I Am

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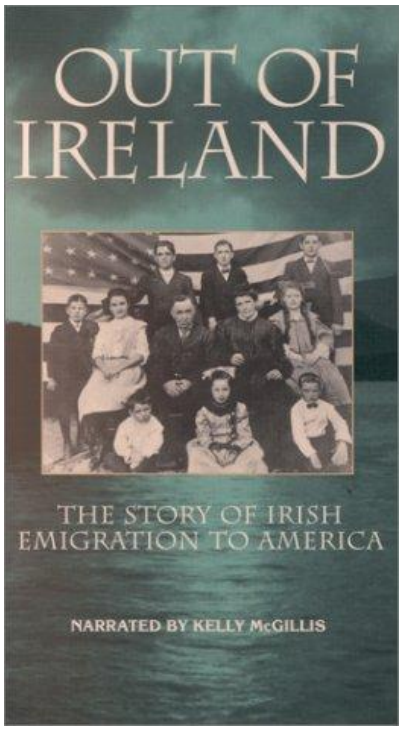

Out of Ireland - Narrated by Kelly McGillis

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

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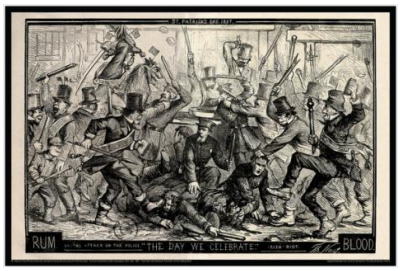

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