

## **The Irish Story: From Struggle to Success**

You're faced with a choice: stay and face death, disease, starvation during a famine, and, possibly be taken out of your home or leave to America in hopes of a better life. Irish immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries were faced with the same situation. 510,000 immigrants chose to leave and take the hazardous journey to America. Immigrants were faced with challenges as soon as they arrived in America, but eventually succeeded and influenced American society.

One reason people left Ireland was because of the Irish potato famine. The potato famine was from 1845-1850. Potato was the main crop and 90% of it got wiped out by the disease blight. Blight is a disease that infects crops. People were starving in Ireland because the food that they depended on to survive was not available. The little food left was not affordable during the famine, nor did soup kitchens remain open. The famine left the country in tatters. The potato famine ruined Ireland which led people to emigrate.

Another reason people emigrated was because people all around them were dying and getting sick. Cholera and other infectious diseases were spreading through Ireland. People were dying of starvation. Over one million Irish people died. In fact, in just one year, 1847, 18.5% of the population died. The population in Ireland in 1851 was 6,552,385 people. The census committee argues that it would have been 9,018,799 people if the famine hadn't happened. All of Ireland was full of death and disease. The choice was to get sick or starve or try to leave.

Not only were people suffering from the famine, but political push factors were also an influence for immigration. Soup kitchens in Ireland were run by the British and paid for by Irish taxes and since the Irish couldn't pay, the soup kitchens were closed. All farm lands that were farmed by Irish farmers were rented from the British. This meant that farmers truly did not own the land they worked. Jobs disappeared. The British would evict people from their homes because people couldn't pay their rent. Life in Ireland was very difficult.

Many immigrants thought America was the best place to go. First, in America there were job opportunities. Ireland lacked jobs after the famine. Even farmers did not have steady jobs because the British owned the fields they worked. They hoped to find jobs in America. When they arrived, most people found jobs as construction workers, delivery men, and ditch diggers. People could make a better living in America.

Second, Some immigrants had their tickets paid for by rich Americans. In return, the immigrants would be servants in America for the people who paid for their tickets. If immigrants couldn't pay for tickets it was a good deal because they could get to America and have work without paying for tickets. A job is a job and being a servant is better than starving. Being a servant could lead to finding a better paying job which could lead to becoming successful.

A third reason people came was because life in America was more safe and stable than in Ireland. In America you could get food more easily so you wouldn't starve. New immigrants were getting assistance from older immigrants. They formed communities of immigrants that helped one another. Life was easier in America than in Ireland.

However, before the immigrants reached America they had a treacherous journey which began in Liverpool, England. Most people had to get to Liverpool two days in advance. A majority got to Liverpool from Dublin's Kingstown port. It had a direct rail line to Liverpool. Most people couldn't go to a waiting ship right away, so once in Liverpool they would see an agent or a ship brokers agency to make sure everything was alright with their voyage. Immigrants stayed in boarding houses while waiting for a ship. The boarding houses were known to be awful since they overcharged and the houses were very crowded. Liverpool held dangers for unaware immigrants. They faced the danger of scams and overcharging. Liverpool was tough for the Irish but at least immigrants were closer to boarding a ship to America.

Immigrants took iron-hulled steamships to America. The ship's conditions were awful. The weather was terrible on the journey. The ships were very crowded which led to little privacy. For most there was limited time on deck. They had to stay inside for most or all of the journey. People got sick on board because of the dreadful conditions which led to death. For most the ship ride was terrible and hazardous. The ships became known as coffin ships. This is because of the amount of deaths on the ships. Between 1846 and 1847 20,000 people died. This was on ships to Canada alone although many of those who survived would go on to America. The death on board was just another challenge for immigrants along the way.

On the ships there were different zones and each had a different price. Steerage was the worst of the zones, yet the cost was 4-5 Irish pounds which was equal to half the income of a worker. The conditions were horrible. Second class had a cost of a 8 Irish pounds. The second best zone was second class. Second class had much better conditions than steerage. The best zone was first class. First class cost a high price of 25 Irish pounds, for it had good food. First

class was hard to afford for most. Depending on which zone you were in your ride could've been amazing or terrible.

After the journey across the Atlantic the Irish lived in overcrowded places. As soon as immigrants would get to America, they would be greeted by runners. They would offer them a place to live. Runners would then take them to tenements. These tenements had very high prices. Others crammed themselves in with more people than meant for in one house. They couldn't afford better. This meant the immigrants had little space. This mostly happened in big cities such as New York. The big cities didn't have enough space for all the people.

Not only were they very crowded but the conditions were also bad. The places they lived lacked good sewage, nor was there healthy water which was another large problem. This made it nearly impossible to stay clean. These factors led to disease and unhealthiness. Some diseases that came from bad conditions were cholera, typhus, mental illness and tuberculosis. These are all deadly diseases. The living conditions were truly challenging.

The conditions were deadly and Americans discriminated against Irish people. They had a bad reputation. Americans thought they were better than immigrants. People wouldn't let the Irish work for them. They hung "No Irish Need Apply" signs. A young woman wrote a song about it and it was put in the newspaper. Her name was Kathleen O'Neil and she was an immigrant. This was taken as a joke, but it was meant to show how badly the Irish were being discriminated. The Irish took unsafe, bad paying jobs because of lack of education. Mary Harris Jones fought for the Irish, for she was an immigrant herself. She fought for equal working rights. People truly hated the Irish.

Although it is not commonly known there is Irish culture and people with Irish background all around. This shows how the Irish succeed in America although they initially faced with roadblocks. People may not know it, but a lot of famous people have Irish background. Many famous singers and athletes have some Irish background. Some singers are Rihanna, Mariah Carey, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Kelly Clarkson and Taylor Swift. Some athletes are Derek Jeter, John Elway, Mark McGwire, John McEnroe, Nolan Ryan and Tom Brady. The Irish really became famous in this country.

Some sports teams have Irish-related names, showing how much the Irish influenced America and sports. They are the Boston Celtics and the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. The Celtics got their name because Walter Brown chose it. He chose it because Boston was full of Irishmen.

That is the same reason they wear green. There are many tales on how Notre Dame got their team name. One story is that one game Notre Dame was losing to Michigan. A player on the team yelled at his teammates “What’s the matter with you guys? You’re all Irish and you’re not fighting worth a lick!” Notre Dame came back to win and the press called it a win for the Fighting Irish. The Irish really influenced sports in America.

There are many ways that Irish culture influenced America besides sports. There are many Irish pubs, a holiday and beers in America. Two beers became extremely popular in America. The brands are Guinness and Samuel Adams. There also many Irish pubs in America. They have become very popular in New York. A few out of many are The Dead Poet, The Parlour, St. James Gate, Mcaleers Pub and The Abbey Pub. A largely celebrated holiday is Saint Patrick's Day. New York City celebrates and people go to pubs. There is a large parade. The Irish have truly influenced American culture.

After a variety of challenges such as a great hunger and discrimination, the Irish were able to persevere in America. Sports, music and American culture has had its share of contributions from the Irish. All in all, the Irish story did not start out as a good one faced with a famine and the oppressing British. After a long hard voyage, they reached America and were faced with challenges such as discrimination. However, today people that are looked up to have an Irish background. After all that the Irish impacted America.