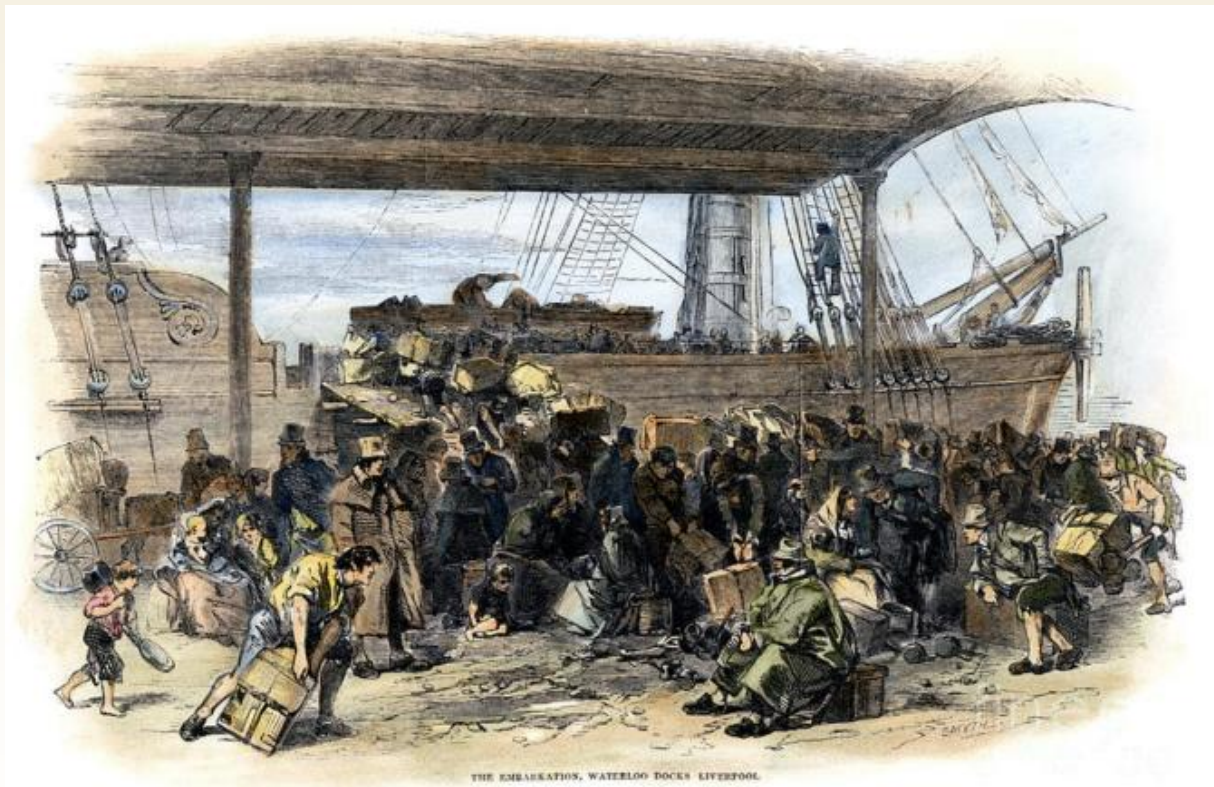


Keeping in Touch: How Emigrants Overseas Wrote Back Home

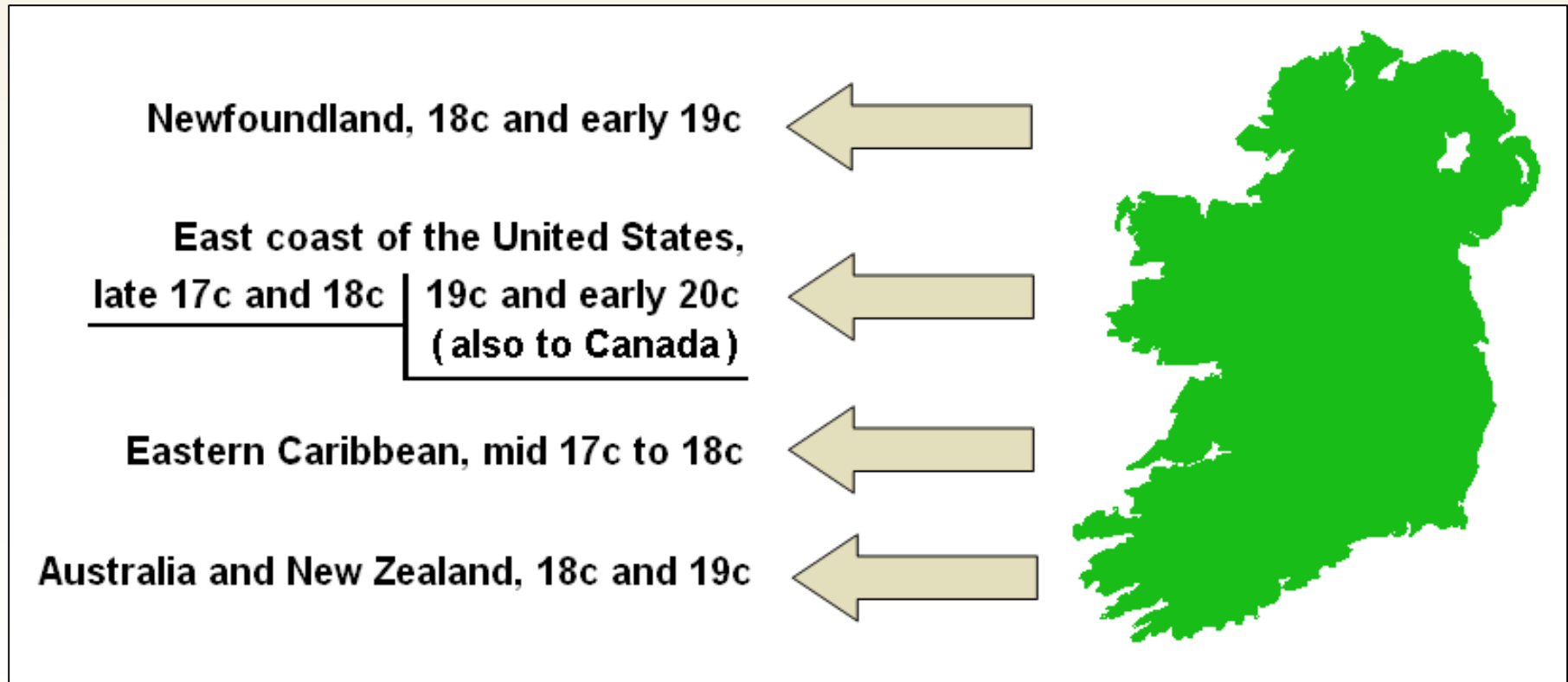


Berlinhead, April the 28th 1844
My dear Father
I take the liberty of writing
these few lines to you hoping to
find you my Mother & Sister
and Sister in good health as that
leaves me & Sister and my Mother
in good health thanks to the
Winged Redeemer for his great
love and mercy
My dear Father I am to
inform you that we left Dublin
on the 26th instant for the City
of America and that we are to sail on
Monday next and the passengers
are to board the vessel

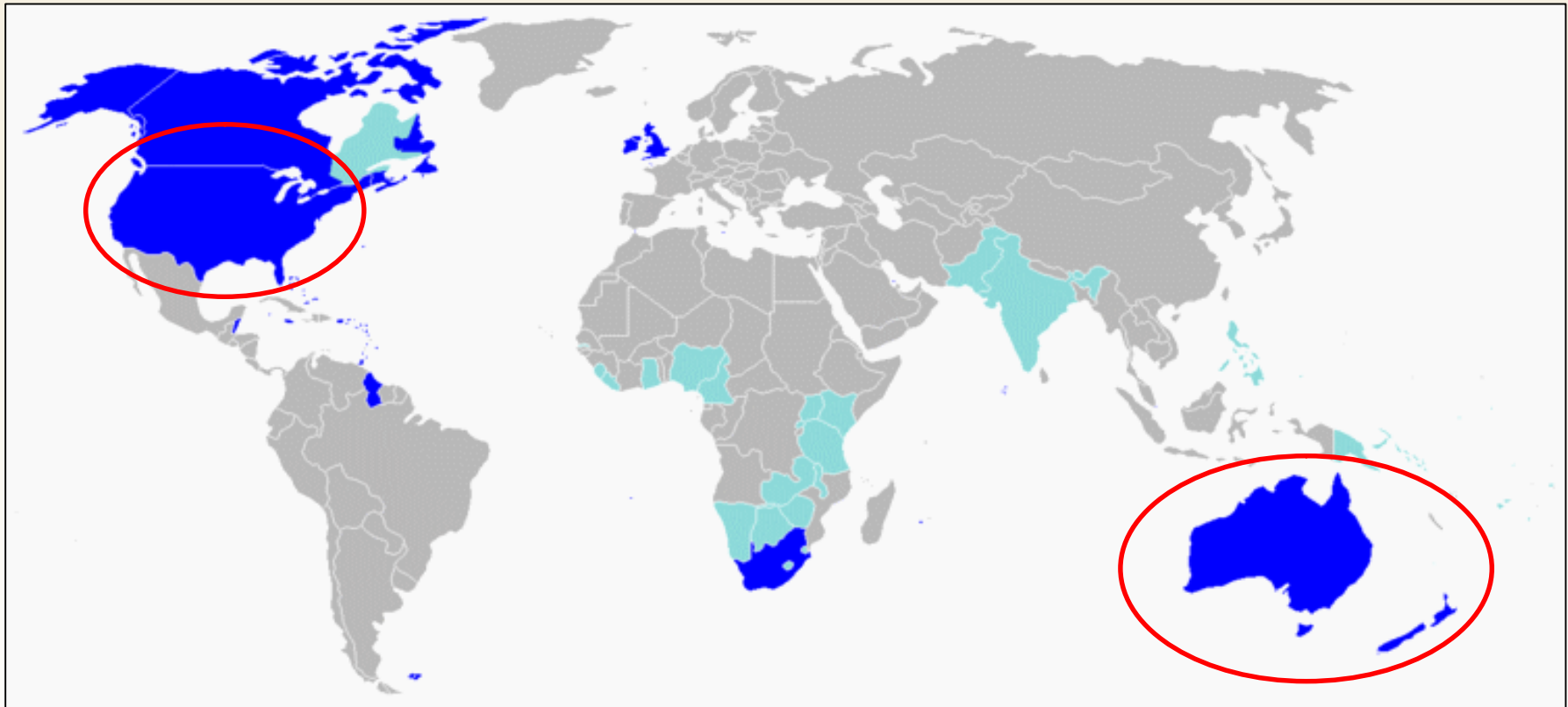
Prof. Raymond Hickey, University of Limerick
Email: raymond.hickey@uni-due.de
Website: www.raymondhickey.com



Emigration from Ireland



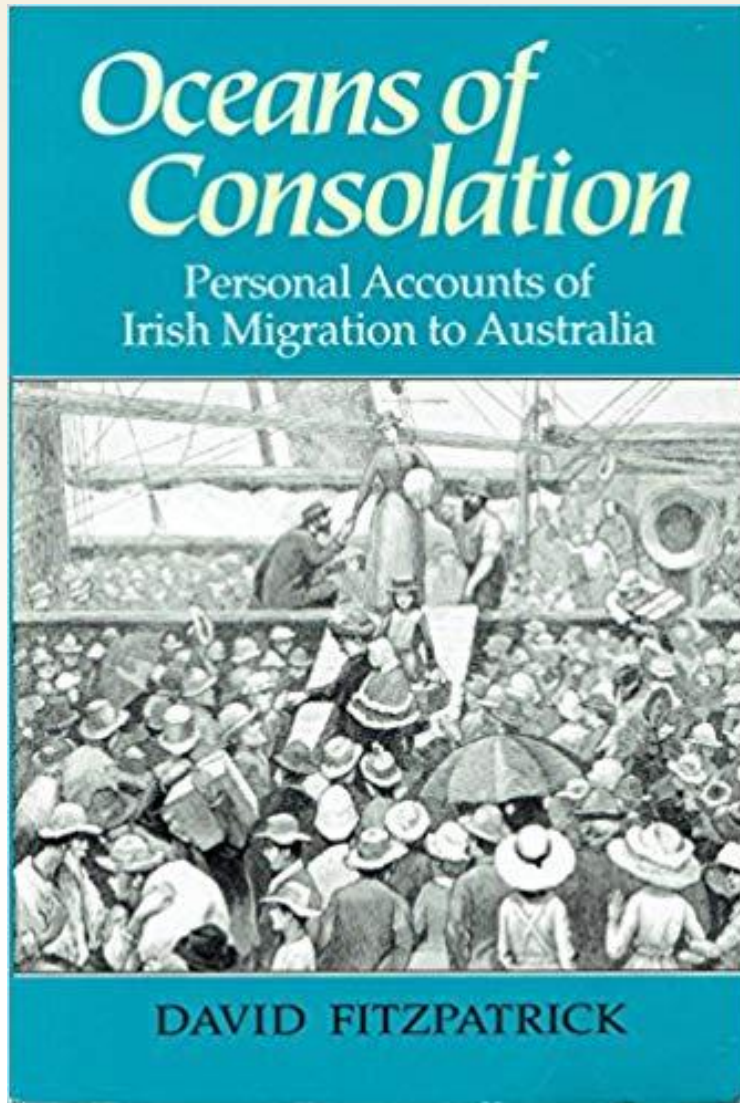
Destinations for Irish emigrants in the English-speaking world



Primarily to: USA / Canada and Australia / New Zealand

(areas in blue: destinations for settlers; areas in green: countries without any large English-speaking settler population; there was also a small amount of emigration to non-anglophone countries, e.g. Argentina (mentioned in short story *Eveline* in James Joyce's *Dubliners*).

Irish emigration to Australia



Also: Australian emigrant letters from the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (Kevin McCafferty [Bergen] and Carolina Amador Moreno [Cáceres]) - following slide.



CORVIZ

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CORVIZ Project

CORVIZ is the acronym of the project 'CORIECOR visualized. Irish English in writing across time (a longitudinal historical perspective)' The aim of the project is to create a publicly accessible, sustainable electronic correspondence corpus, the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR), so that it can then be used for further research by the wider academic community.

What is CORIECOR?

CORIECOR is a corpus of Irish emigrants' letters that allows researchers to trace the emergence and development of features of Irish English and study syntactic, morphological, stylistic, regional and social variation. The letters are from 1731–1940, which spans the period during which Ireland became overwhelmingly English-speaking.

The triggers for emigration

Economically motivated emigration covered a wide spectrum of situations prior to departure. These could range from famine, with the threat of starvation, to the price of land and the value of crops in different parts of Britain or Ireland. In general, the more extreme the situation, the less likely emigrants were to chance their fortune as farmers, e.g. the Irish fleeing famine during the nineteenth century settled largely in urban centres in the eastern United States as did Poles and Italians (in New York) whereas Germans and Scandinavians settled in the rural Upper Mid-West, e.g. in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.



The triggers for emigration

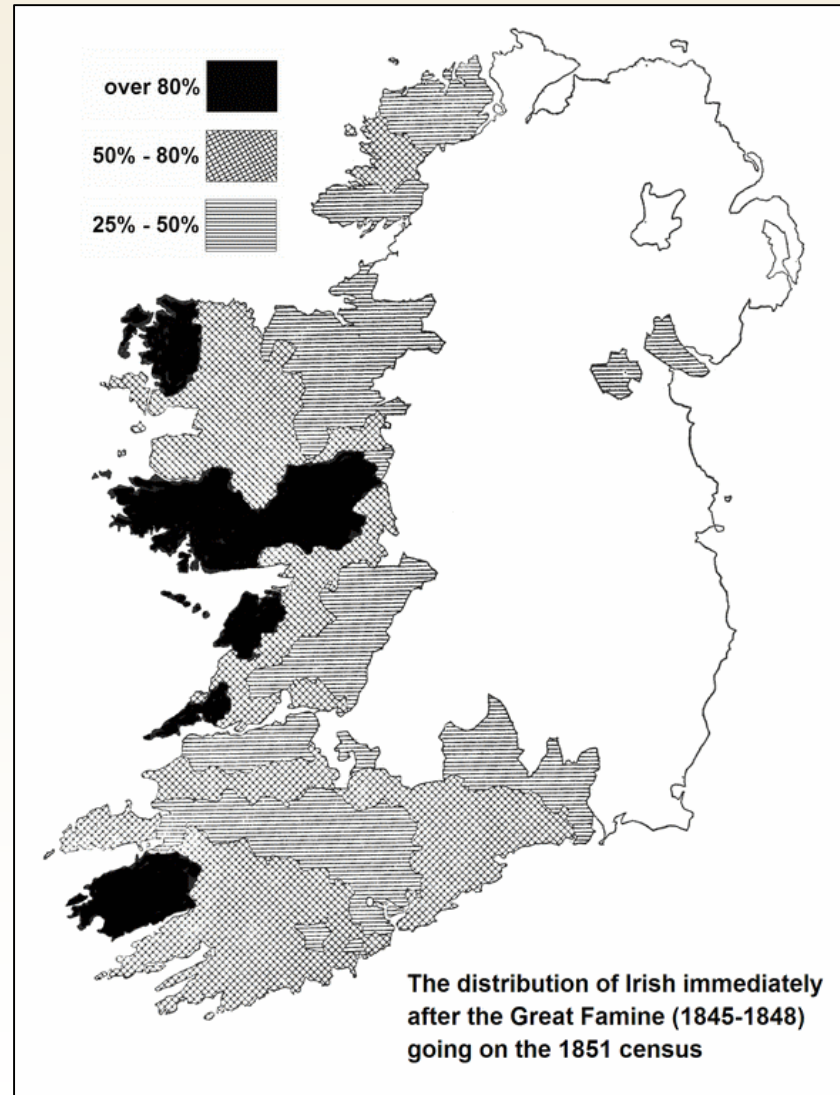
The situation for settlers at the new colony depended on a variety of factors such as whether they came as families or individuals, via assisted or self-financed emigration, whether they were English, Scottish or Irish. In all colonies of Britain, the British were at an advantage as they were citizens of the country which ran the colony (this is particularly relevant in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, less so elsewhere, e.g. South Africa). The initial financial resources of emigrants were also important. For those who could buy land and build homes straight away the economic situation was obviously much more favourable. This did not apply to the poor Irish who went to North America in the nineteenth century.



The Great Famine (1845-8)



Hillside famine graveyard
outside Dungarvan.



The Western seaboard was worst hit by the famine.

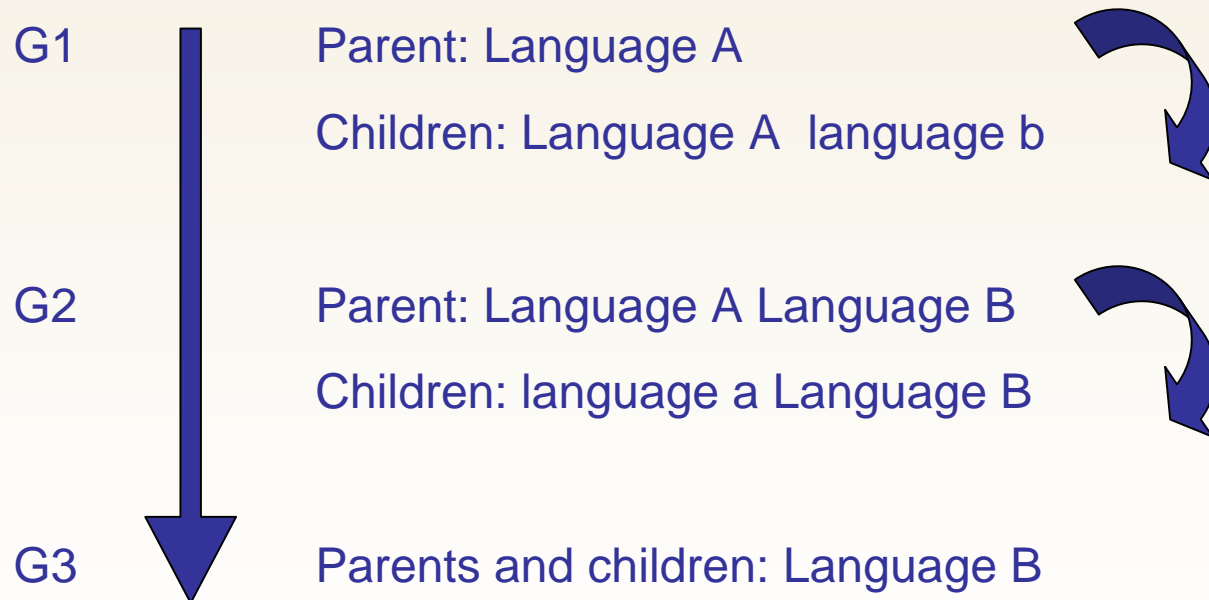
Language shift in nineteenth-century Ireland

Irish → **English**

In the second half of the 19th century the majority of the Irish population shifted to English. By 1900 less than 10% of the population were Irish speakers.

Irish → **English**

Three generations model of language shift (A,a = Irish, b,B = English)



The emigration experience in art



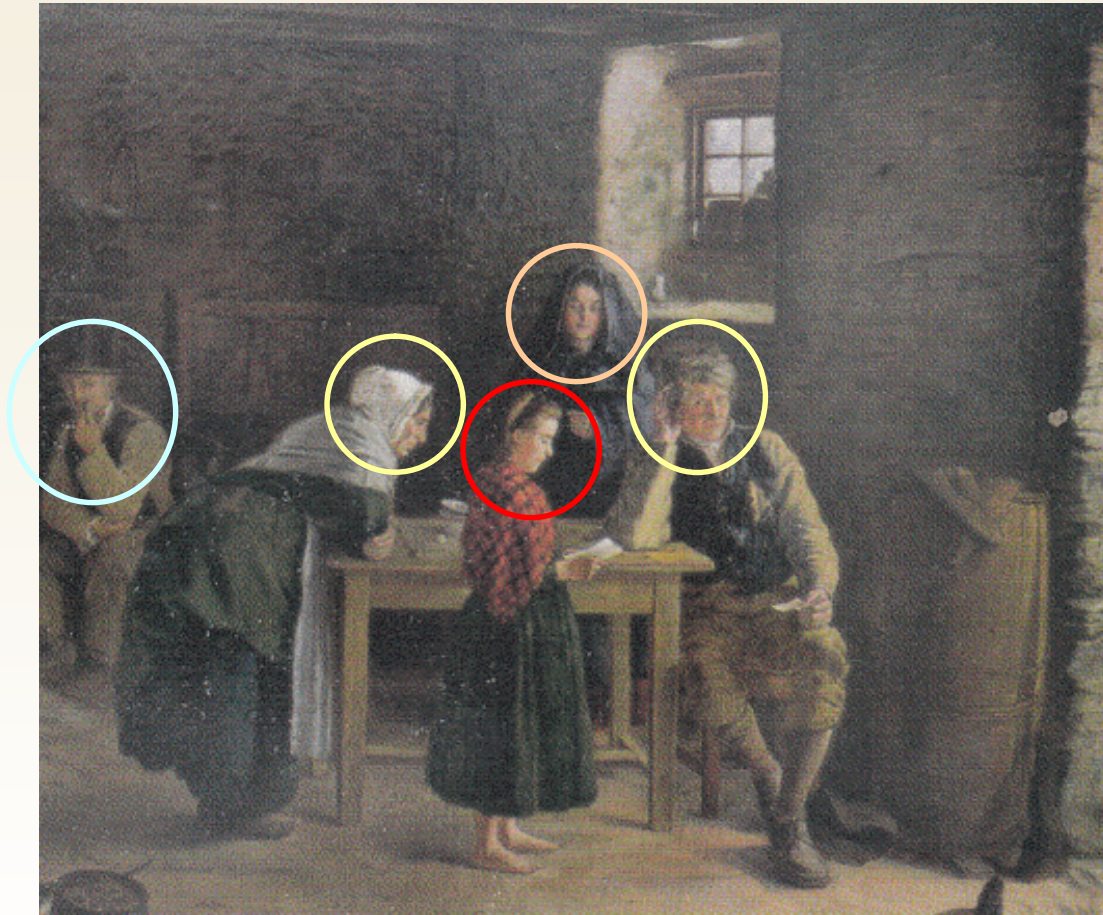
Farewell (Seán Keating, 1889-1977). The distress of emigration and the breaking of one's ties with one's background comes across clearly in this picture of parting for a ship leaving Ireland (traditionally called *an bád bán* 'the white ship' in Irish).

The emigration experience in art



Letter from America (1875, by Irish painter James Brenan, 1837-1907).

The emigration experience in art



Note that it is the young girl who is reading the letter from overseas, written in English. The parents are listening attentively hoping to understand the language while the older man on the left is completely detached (probably a native speaker of Irish with no English). The elder sister behind the table is dreaming of emigrating for a better life outside rural Ireland.

The emigration experience in art

Compare the Irish painting by James Brenan with the *The Emigrant Letter* by the English painter Thomas Webster (1800–1886). Here two elderly individuals are contemplating a letter (apparently from a child?) with an interested neighbour (the deliverer of the letter?) involved in the scene.

There is no suggestion that any of the individuals in the painting would experience language difficulties with the letter.



Having your letter written by someone else



The Village Scribe (1881, by James Brenan, 1837-1907)

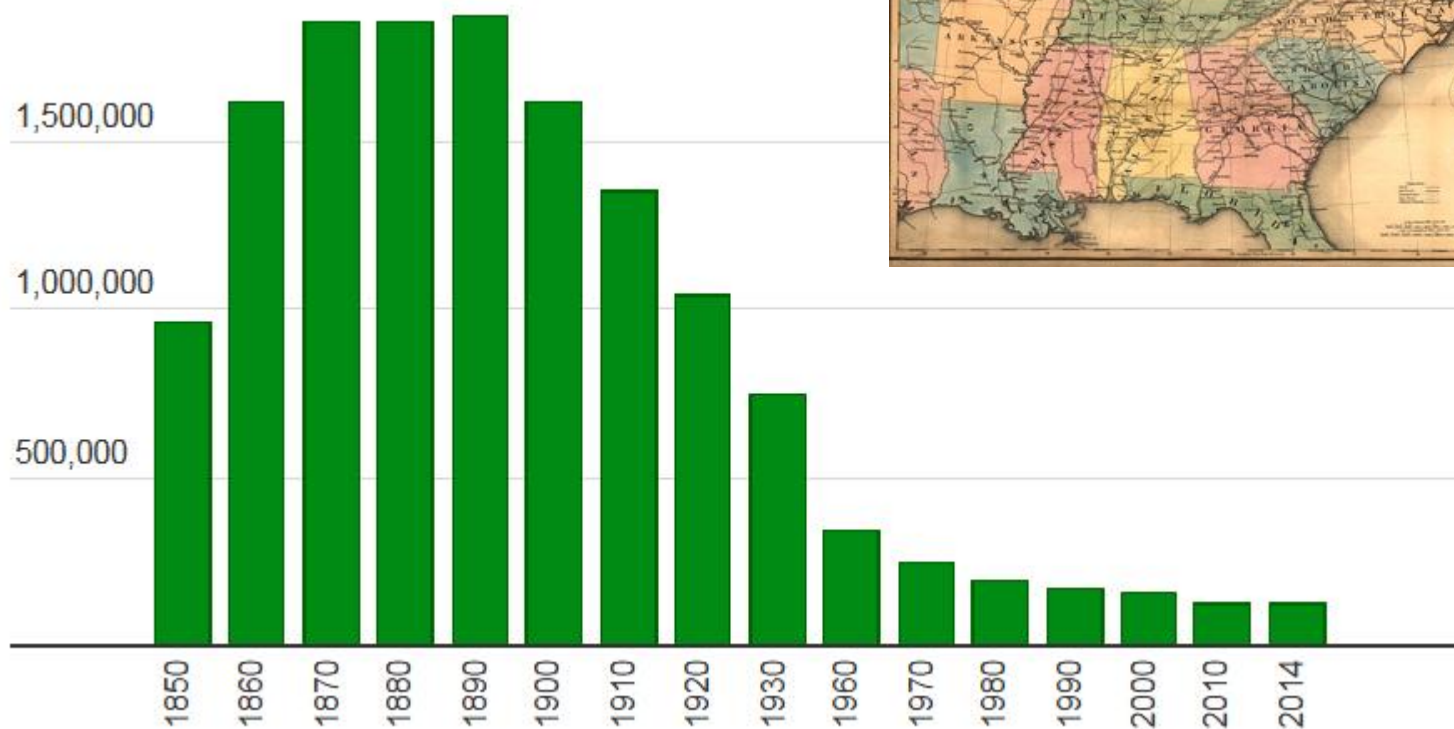
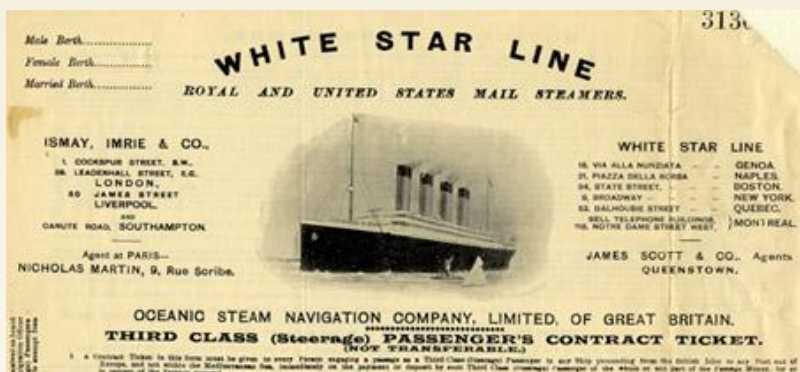
Finally leaving for the New World



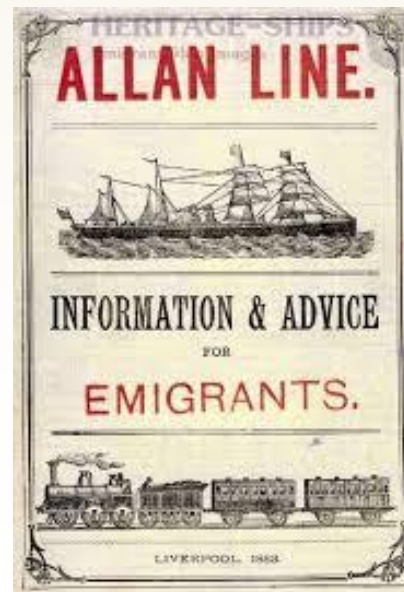
Finishing Touch (1876, by James Brenan, 1837-1907)

Note: young woman in the left background is the person emigrating.

Irish emigration to the USA



Organizing transportation of people from Ireland to the New World



Replica of the *Dunbrody*, New Ross, Co. Wexford



WILLIAM GRAVES & SON THE QUAY, NEW ROSS PASSENGERS' CONTRACT TICKET.



N. B.—Any one receiving money from or in respect of any passenger about leaving the United Kingdom for any Place in North America, without using this Form, and correctly filling up the Blanks therein, and signing it with his name in full, will be liable to a Penalty not exceeding £10 for each such Passenger.

Ship Dunbrody of 458 tons register burthen, to sail from New Ross
for New York on the 18th day of March 1849

I engage that the Parties herein named shall be provided with a Steerage Passage to New York

in the Ship Dunbrody with not less than 10 cubic feet for Luggage for each Statute adult, for the

sum of £ £7.00 including Head Money, if any, at the place of landing, and every other charge; and I hereby acknowledge to have received the sum of £ _____ in _____ payment.

Water and Provisions, according to the annexed scale, will be supplied by the Ship or required by law, and also fires, and suitable hearths for cooking.

Bedding and utensils for eating and drinking must be provided by the Passengers.

Signature, William Graves

Date, _____

SCALE OF PROVISIONS AND WATER THAT WILL BE SUPPLIED TO EACH ADULT BY THE SHIP.

3½lb. of Bread: 3½lb. in all of Flour, Oatmeal, or Meal or a proportionate quantity of Potatoes, (3½lb. of Potatoes being computed as equal to 1lb. of the other articles above enumerated.) } Per week. } Issued not less often than twice a week.
3 quarts of Water per day.

No.	NAMES.	No. of Statute Adults.
1	<u>Biddy Hannan</u>	<u>30</u>
2	<u>Michael Hannan</u>	
3	<u>William Hannan</u>	
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Deposit £ _____
Balance £ _____
Total £ £7.00

To be paid at _____
before the 18th March 1849 or Deposit forfeited

To William Graves

NOT TRANSFERABLE





Living quarters
under deck on the
Dunbrody





Steerage passengers

Food on the *Dunbrody*



Captain and first-class passengers

Replica of the
Jeannie Johnston,
now docked at
Custom House
Quay, Dublin



Paddle steamers, using coal-fired engines to augment sailing power, were used somewhat later in the nineteenth century, for the transatlantic routes.



DEPARTURE OF THE "SUN" AND "JEROME" STEAMERS, WITH ENGINEER ON BOARD, FOR AFRICA.

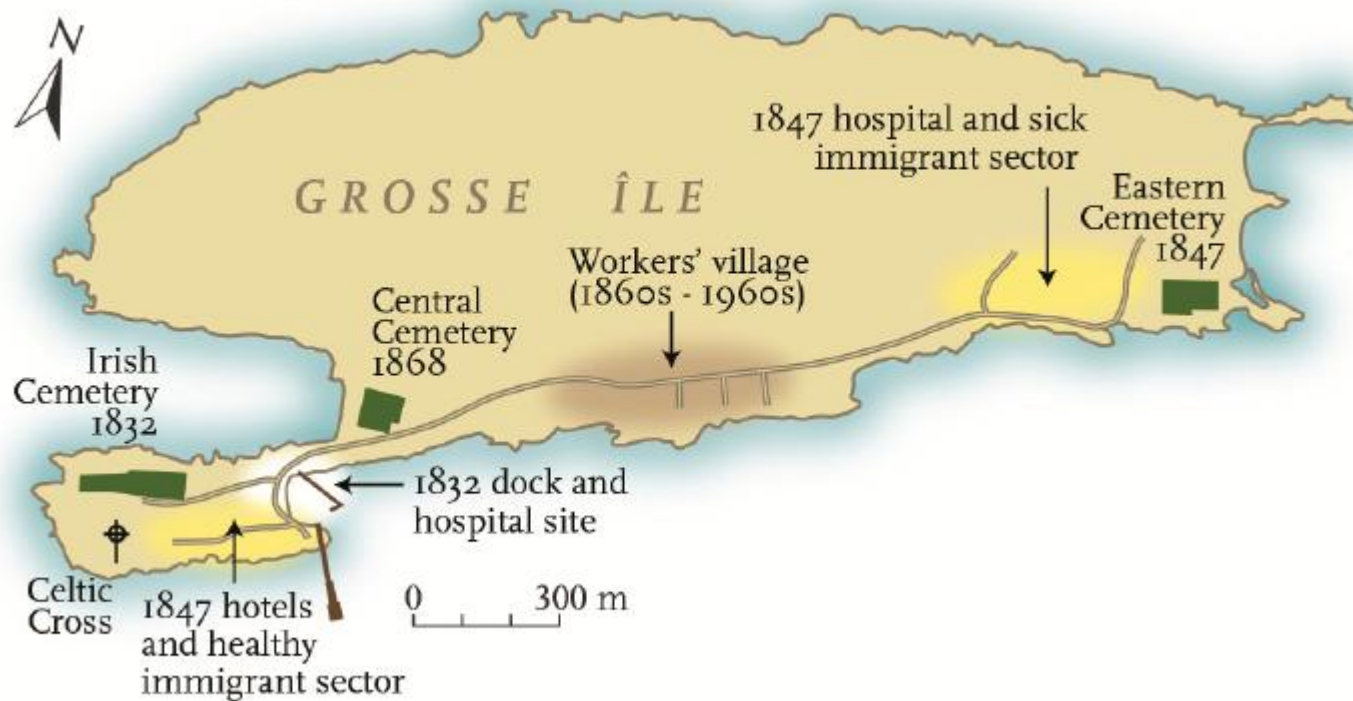
Diesel-engine ocean liners were used from the late 19th century onwards for the transatlantic routes



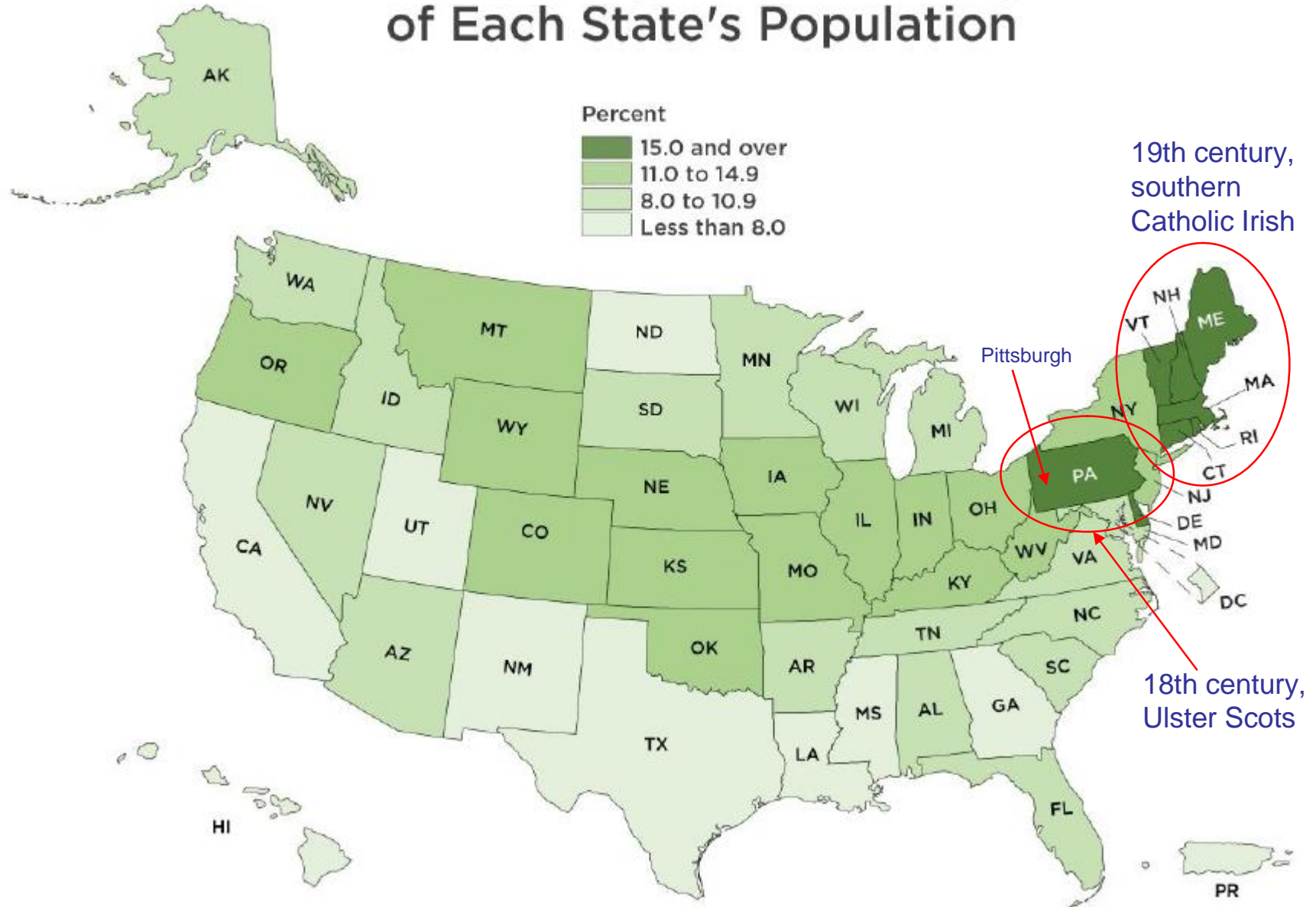
Ellis Island, New York, the main clearance point
for European immigrants



Grosse Île, Quebec, Canada, the main clearance point for European immigrants



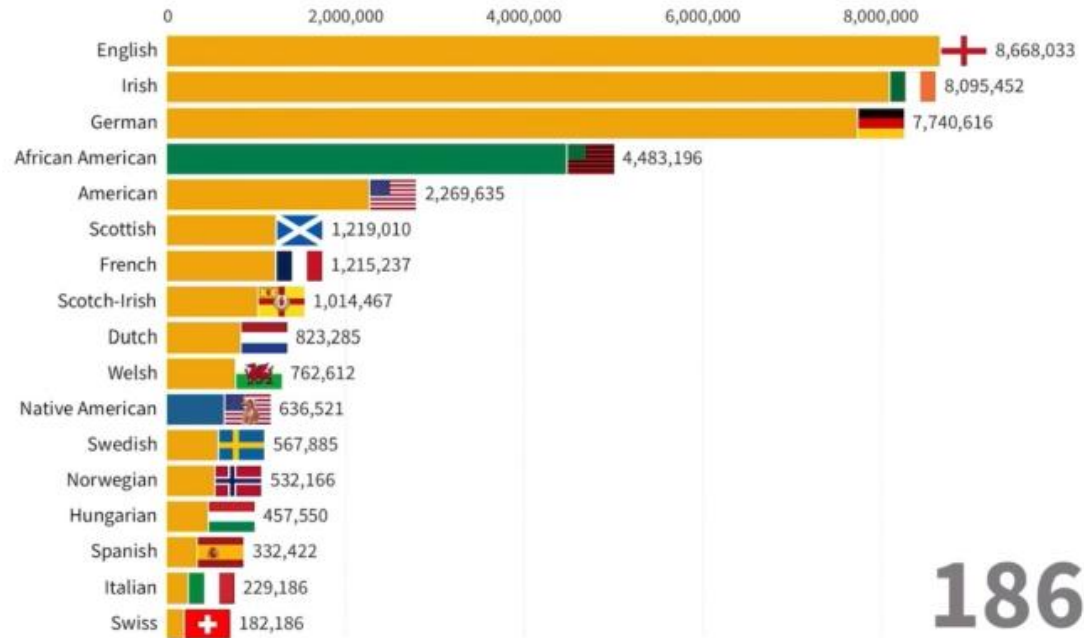
Irish Ancestry as a Percentage of Each State's Population





Different emigrants: The Irish and the Germans

Election cartoon, featuring
Irish and German groups



1860

Five Points area of New York City



Infamous slums at The Bend in the Five Points area of New York City
(later demolished)





Five Points area
of New York City



Irish workers laying railway tracks



Irish workers (mostly women) in textile factories



Irish emigrant women in the USA as female domestic servants



Anti-immigrant sentiments in late 19th, early 20th century USA




(in New York)





(in Hawai'i)

Well-known riot in New York in July 1857, in which four people were killed, involved the Dead Rabbits, an Irish criminal gang



 **Merriam-Webster**
MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

 [Go Online](#)  [Print](#)

Main Entry: **don-ny-brook**
Pronunciation: 'dā-nē-brūk
Function: *noun*
Usage: *often capitalized*
Etymology: *Donnybrook* Fair, annual Irish event known for its brawls

Date: 1852

1 : FREE-FOR-ALL, BRAWL
2 : a usually public quarrel or dispute

Emigrant letters: adding to what we know of emigrant life overseas



Emigrant letters

Emigrants to overseas locations during the colonial period wrote back home recounting their experiences in their new environment and trying to get news of the family members in the home country and to convince potential emigrants to make the move and leave.



Emigrant letters

The survival of personal letters depends on (1) whether settlers wrote letters back home and/or to others in the colony and (2) whether such letters were not destroyed or simply thrown away once read. These letters would then have to find a way into the public domain.



Some groups were better at letter writing than others, e.g. Protestants over Catholics in Ireland as the latter had little or no schooling and were frequently illiterate. Letters from Catholics begin to appear in the nineteenth century after the introduction of primary schooling in the 1830s (National Schools).

Obtaining letter data: the role of serendipity and chance

In many instances, one may by chance come across a number of letters which somehow, some time, some way became available. If you are lucky, someone may have left letters to a library or have given them to a researcher who happened to be in contact with them. Because of this situation we can assume that the available emigrant letters are a miniscule fraction of all such letters.

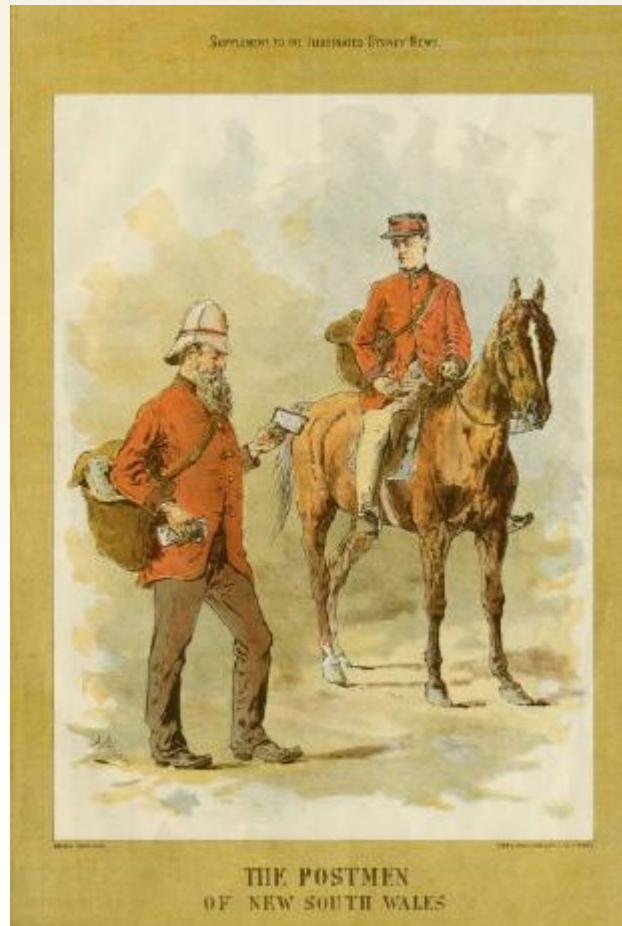
serendipity

[ser-uh n-dip-i-tee] *noun.*

The occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.



The postal service during the later colonial period (1700-1900)



Postal service in the colonies

For the larger colonies, a postal service back home was available on the emigration ships on their return journey. If an overseas location was far inland then post had to be first taken to a port. Then post bags were taken on board ships which often stopped at Cobh (then Queenstown), the first deep harbour reached when sailing back to the British Isles. Irish post was distributed from there and, for rural addresses, post had to be collected from the local post-office in the countryside.

Many weeks, or some months for post from Australia/New Zealand, could elapse between sending and receiving a letter.



Size / weight of letters and postage costs

POST OFFICE REGULATIONS.

ON AND AFTER THE 10th JANUARY, a Letter not exceeding **HALF AN OUNCE IN WEIGHT**, may be sent from any part of the United Kingdom, to any other part, for **ONE PENNY**, if paid when posted, or for **TWO PENCE** if paid when delivered.

THE SCALE OF RATES,

If paid when posted, is as follows, for all Letters, whether sent by the General or by any Local Post,

Not exceeding $\frac{1}{2}$ Ounce **One Penny.**

Exceeding $\frac{1}{2}$ Ounce, but not exceeding 1 Ounce **Twopence.**

Ditto 1 Ounce 2 Ounces **Fourpence.**

Ditto 2 Ounces 3 Ounces **Sixpence.**

and so on; an additional Two-pence for every additional Ounce. With but few exceptions, the **WEIGHT** is limited to **Sixteen Ounces.**

If not paid when posted, double the above Rates are charged on Inland Letters.

COLONIAL LETTERS.

If sent by Packet Twelve Times, if by Private Ship Eight Times, the above Rates.

FOREIGN LETTERS.

The Packet Rates which vary, will be seen at the Post Office. The Ship Rates are the same as the Ship Rates for Colonial Letters.

As regards Foreign and Colonial Letters, there is no limitation as to weight. All sent outwards, with a few exceptions, which may be learnt at the Post Office, must be paid when posted as heretofore.

Letters intended to go by Private Ship must be marked "Ship Letter."

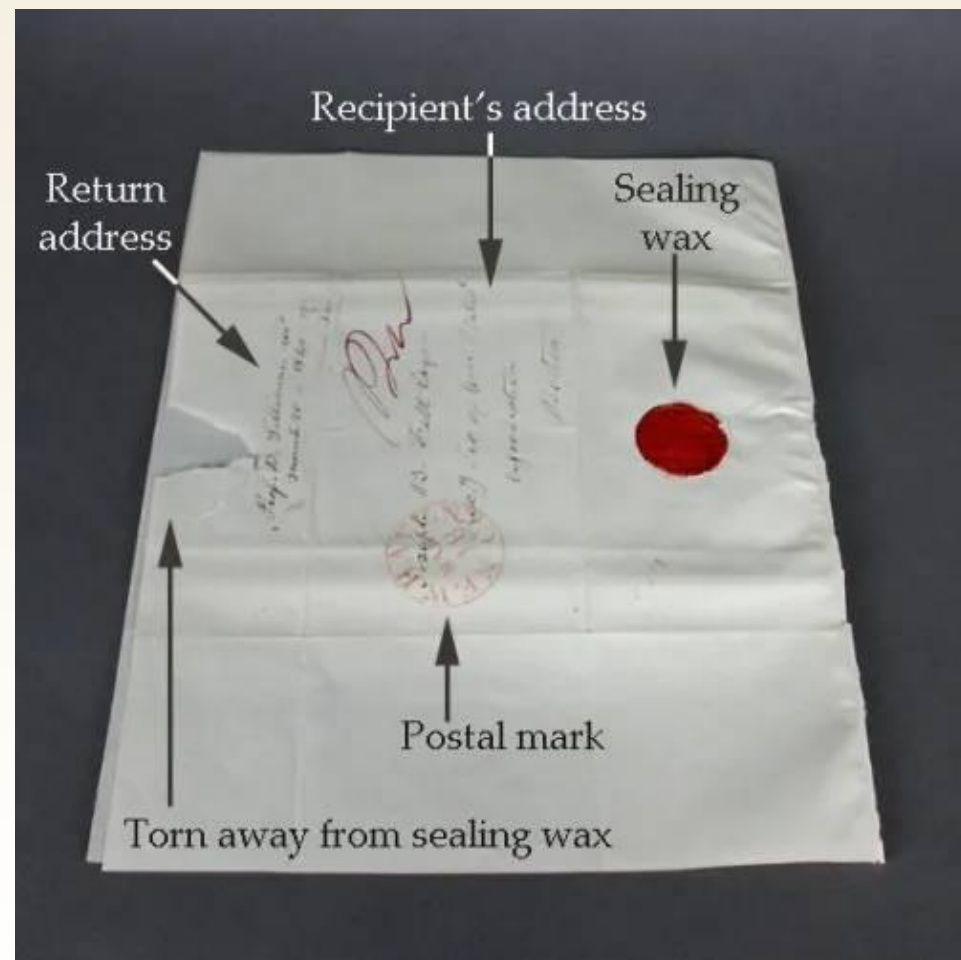
Some arrangements of minor importance, which are omitted in this Notice, may be seen in that placarded at the Post Office.

No Articles should be transmitted by Post which are liable to injury by being stamped, or by being crushed in the Bags.

It is particularly requested that all Letters may be *fully and legibly addressed*, and *posted as early as convenient.*

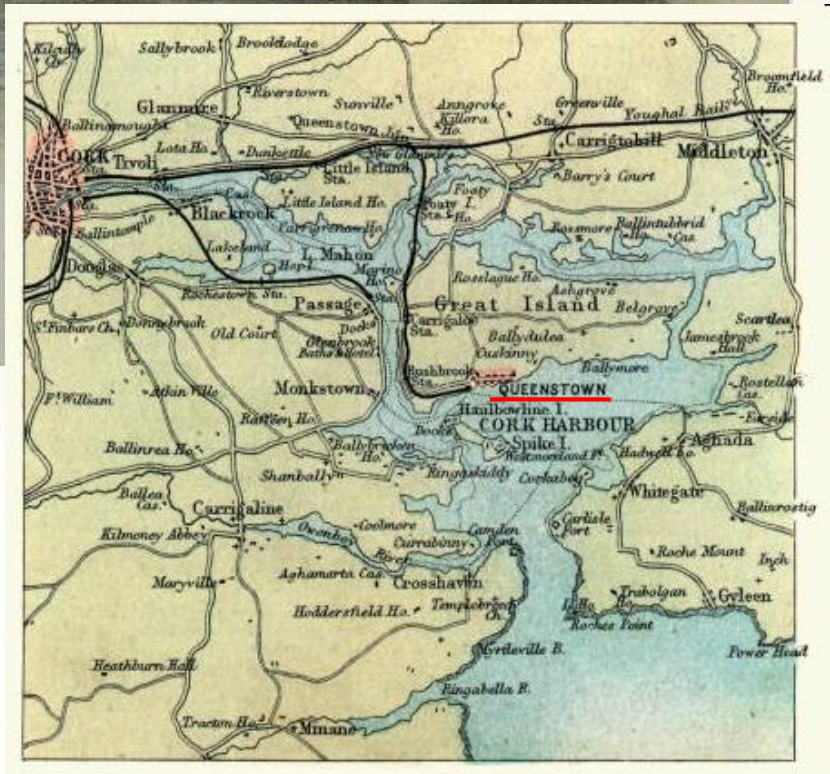
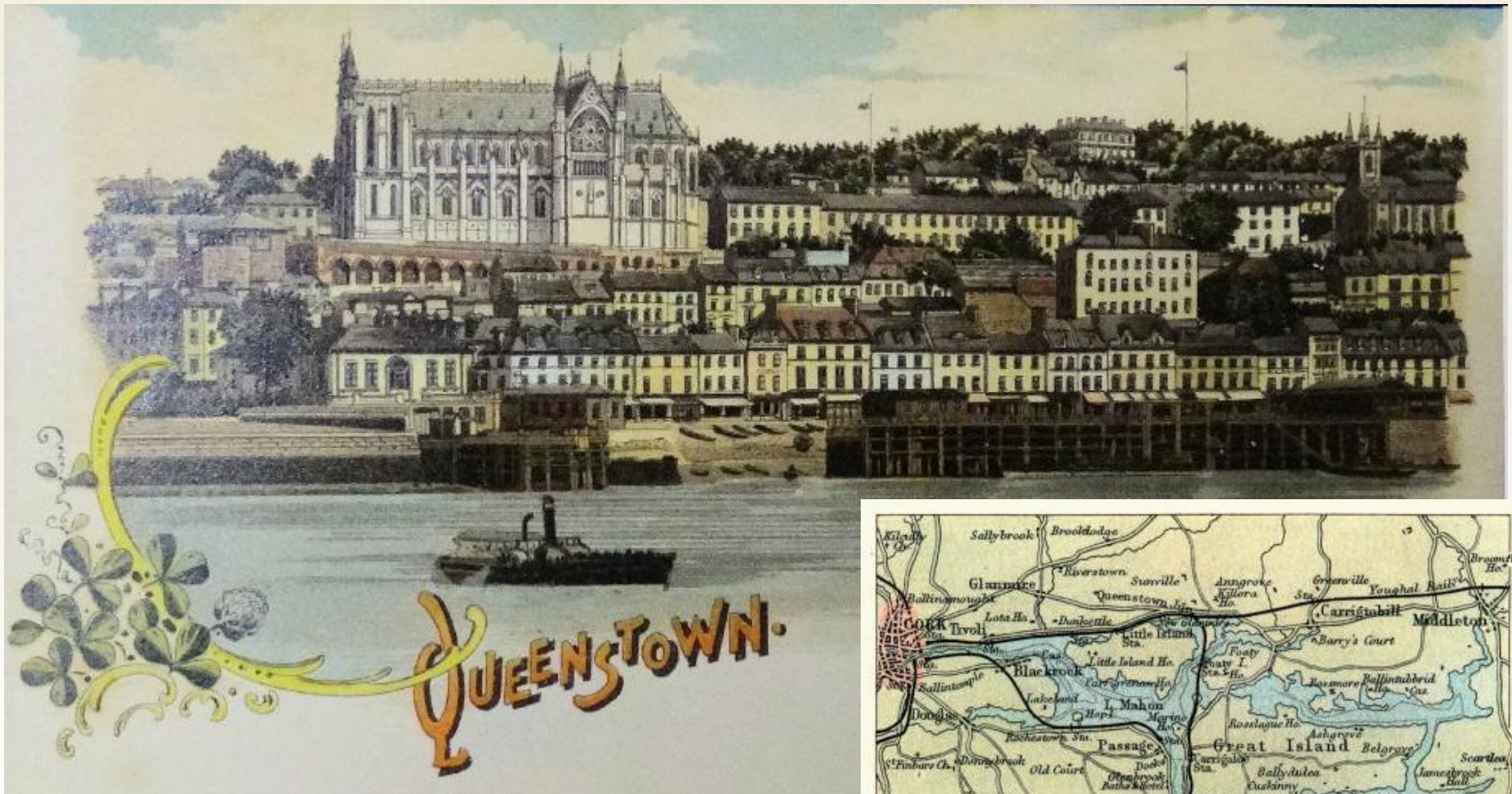
January 7th, 1840.

By Authority: -J. Hartnell, London.



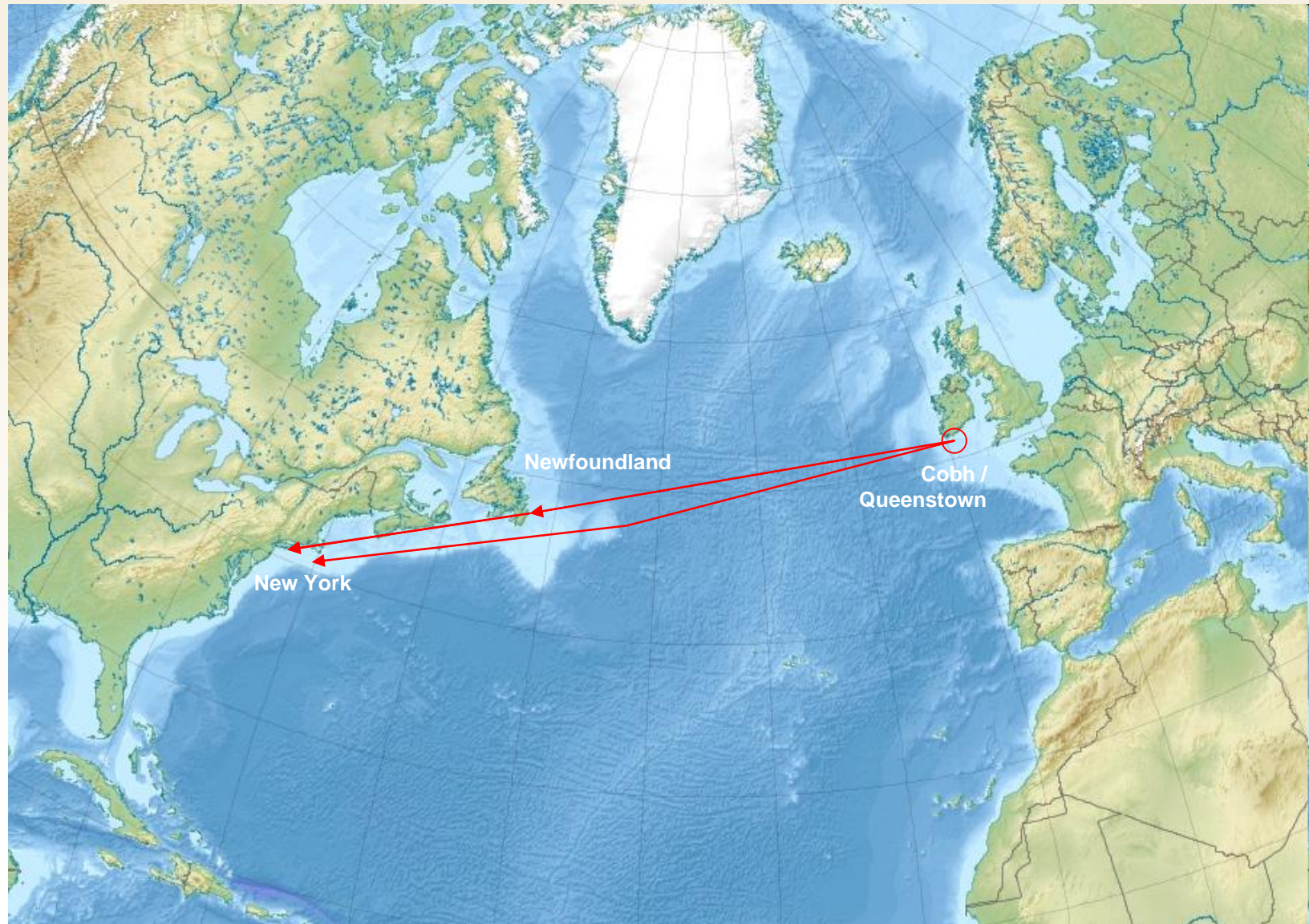
Letter sent from London to Boston. Note that the name of the ship was entered by hand and that this ship left from Queenstown (now Cobh).





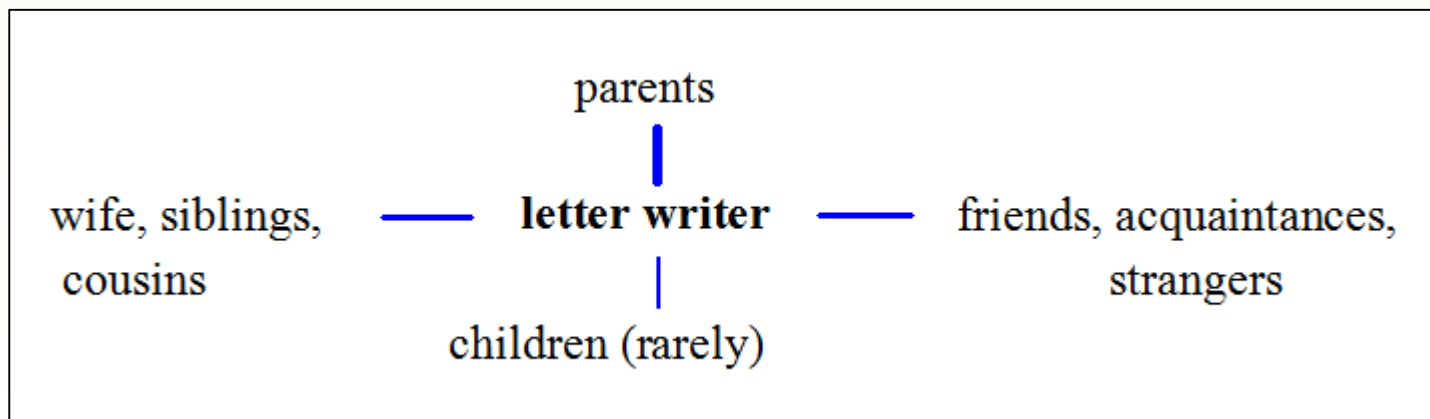
Cobh in Cork
harbour known
from 1849 to 1920
as Queenstown

The closest point in the New World is Newfoundland (eastern Canada). New York is several hundred miles further south-west.



Who did they write to?

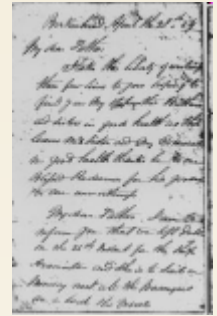
here from you and Sarah
and all the Family.
Dear Sister I hope you will
excuse me for not writing sooner
I was waiting on a new from
Pats letter so now as it went
all right I inclose the sum
of ten Shilings for you -



Selection of topics found in emigrant letters



The harrowing outward journey



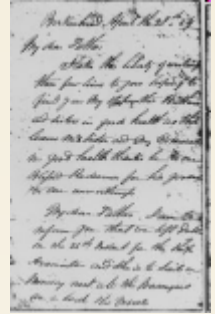
Someone, called McBride, writing in 1847 and giving an account of the journey from Ireland to St John's (Newfoundland) and on to Boston.

[...] the most of the people that came out in your vessels have died in st johns I thought you would like to hear how the crops are in this country they are gineraly very good except the potaitoes they are not very good please send me an account how the crops are in your cowntry Capt Perdon and his Lady wer very good friends to me at sea will you be so kind as to let briget rock know that I saw her Brother Mickeal he was well his wife and all his family died on the pasage except his eldest daughter he was in company with me to Boston parson Irvin of Boston got a situation for my Sister in St Andrews I was so lonesome without her that I sent for her she is now living in the same place with me.

Situation on board the 'coffin ships'



Reassuring those at home



Liverpool, Monday.

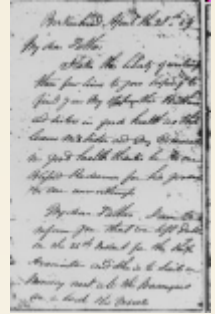
My dear Father

I am just now about to go on board the vessell. She is starting in two or three hours time. I have nothing strange to say. **I am in good health and spirits.** The vessell is as fine a one as you could wish to see. I hope my mother and her children are well. **Be in good spirits we will meet again.**

With love to all at home.

Your affecte Son
P. Comber

Encouraging others to emigrate



Dear Brother,

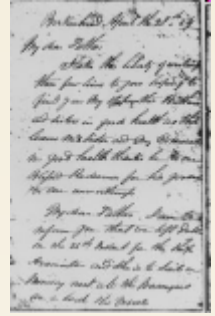
my chief motive in writing [to] you at this time is to encourage you to come here as soon as possible after you receive this. Perhaps there may be some vessels coming to St. John after your receive this. If there are, settle your affairs with speed, and let not [trials] prevent. I would advise you to marry some prudent and virtuous woman before you leave home, and she will be an advantage to you here.

South Melbourne, June the 22nd. 1856

Dear Brother,

I am most anxious that you and family would Come out here where I Can make a happy home for you and myself. This is the place where a man makes all for himself independent of any master for at once you purchace land here you have it for ever without taxes or any other Cess

Encouraging others to emigrate, cont.



Fredericton, New Brunswick, 24th Jan. 1837

Dear Lawrence

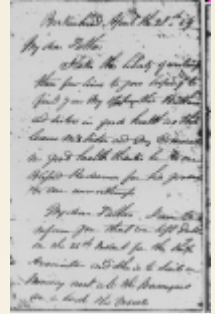
it would take three times that sum (£14 or £15) to bring you and your family and after that you might be 2 or 3 months before you could get settled therefore I consider Boston the ground for you I'm sure if you can get any little shop or store in a populous district **you would do well.**

Meremashe, Chatham Post, Nova Scotia, 16th Aug. 1836

Dear Cousin

I don't encourage any man to Come here from that Place [RH: home]. The journey is so long and Tedious for I Endangered many difficulties to come myself, but now I am not sorry for I did not come the Right Rout, so any friend or Well Wisher that Wishes **to come here let him come by way of Quebec.**

Personal situation overseas; climate



Beale, 1853

I am sorry to hear thou looks old and careworn. I think I am more grey than when I left Ireland, but I am more lusty and never in my life enjoyed such good health, the boys, too are in good condition, fat and ruddy and Jas Kennedy is ab't twice as fat as when he left home.

Barton Terrace, North Adelaide, South Australia, Nov. 19th 1858

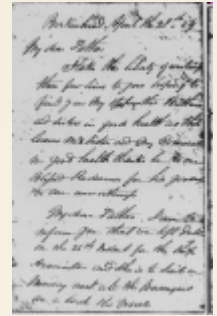
My dear Matilda,

You think you could not bear the heat, but it does not last long without intervals of cold—we have heavenly weather at times. This is the most disagreeable month, many days so dusty that you should be quite astonished where it comes from, but on the whole I don't find fault with the climate and believe it healthier than home

Very affectionate Aunt

E. Wily

Position of women overseas



Dear Cousin

this is the **best Place in the Known World for Woman of every description**. I am informed a Hired girl can get from 15 to 16 Dollars Per Month or a Woman that can cook can get 20 Dollars Per month. Remember me to all enquiring Friends and well Wishers too Tedious too mention. No more at present.

From your most Affectionate & Beloved Cousin

Silvester Dooly

Yearning for the home country

St John, New Brunswick, 17th August 1834.

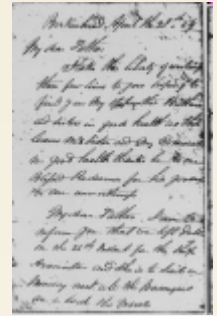
Dear Father,

I am now employed as second steward of the Woodswick Steamboat, who plies from here to Frederickstown, at a salary of 40s per month. I found I was but a few days out of employ after my arrival here. I intend to go home again in the course of 2 years and I trust you will make no arrangement of parting with your land till then, at which you may be assured I shall return.

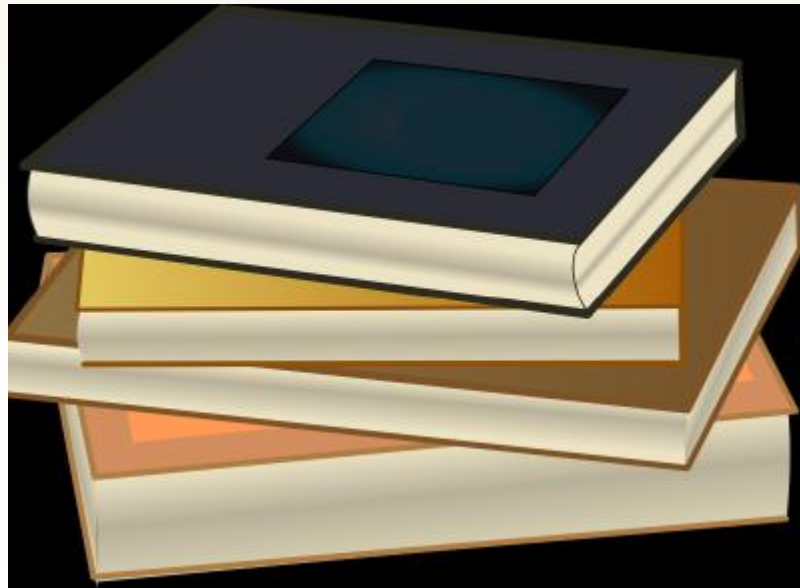
St John, New Brunswick, 6th October 1847.

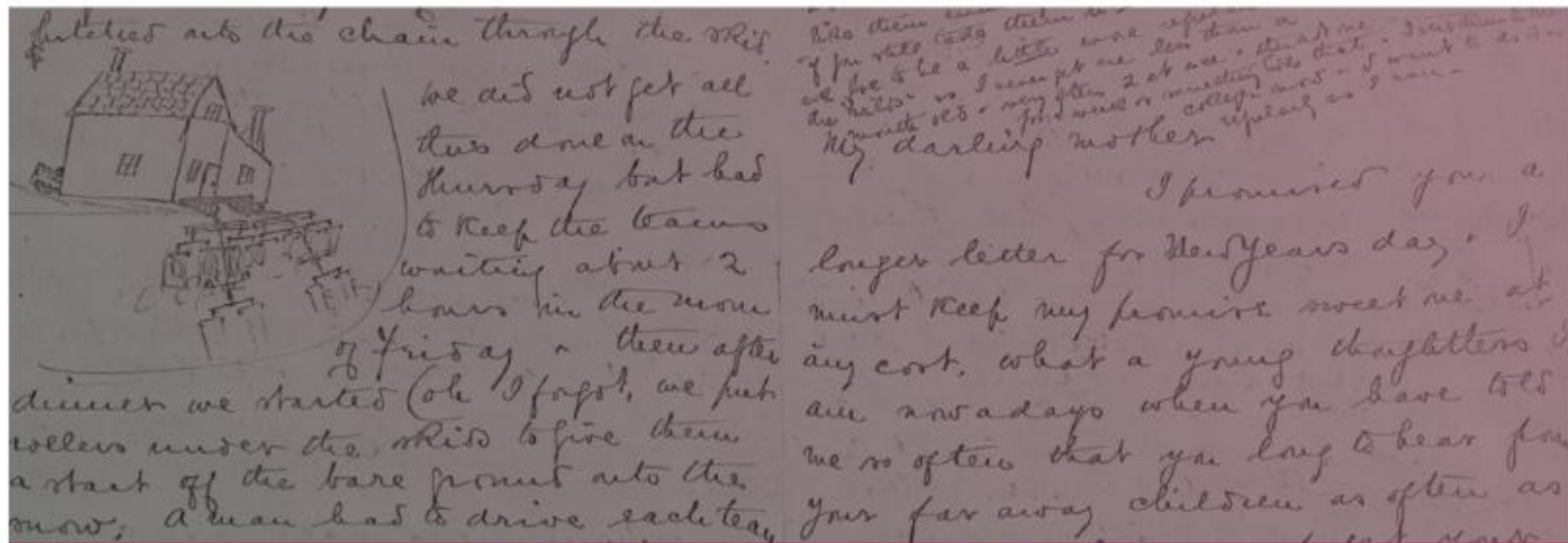
My dear Uncle John,

I take great delight in being able to inform you, that I am quite well and in a good Situation, and so far, I can not say that I am sorry that I left home, except that my heart aches now and again, to see those faces which I loved and yet left them behind me.



Some further sources and references





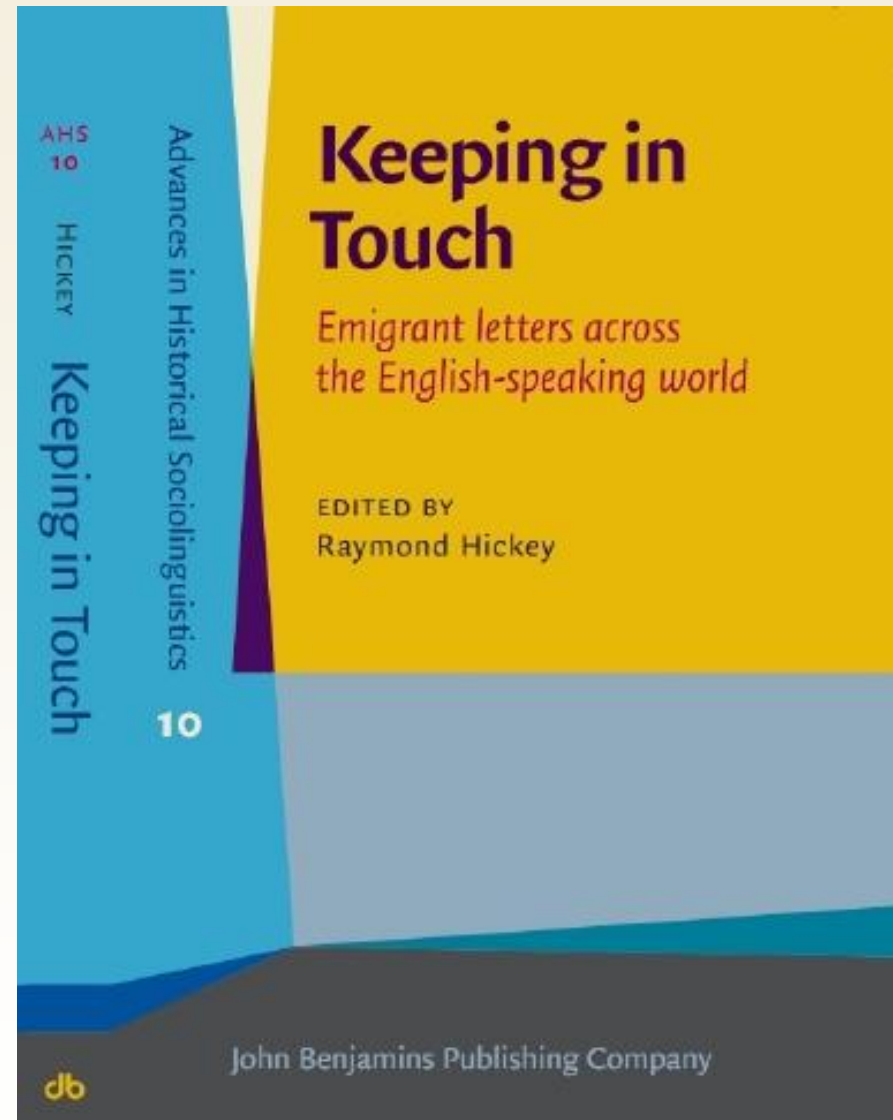
Imirce

The Kerby A. Miller Collection

Irish Emigrant Letters and Memoirs from North America

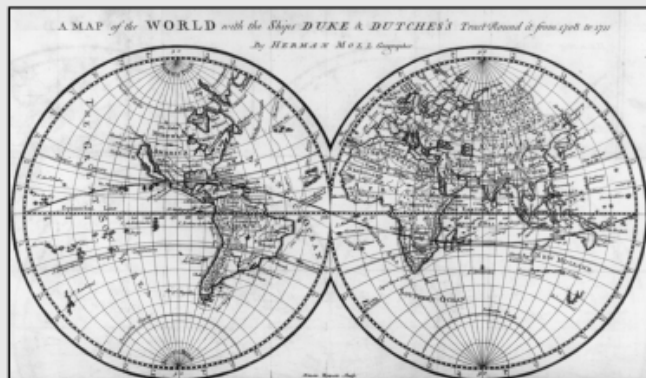
<https://imirce.universityofgalway.ie>

Hickey, Raymond
(eds) 2019. *Keeping
in Touch. Emigrant
Letters across the
English-speaking
World*. Amsterdam:
John Benjamins.

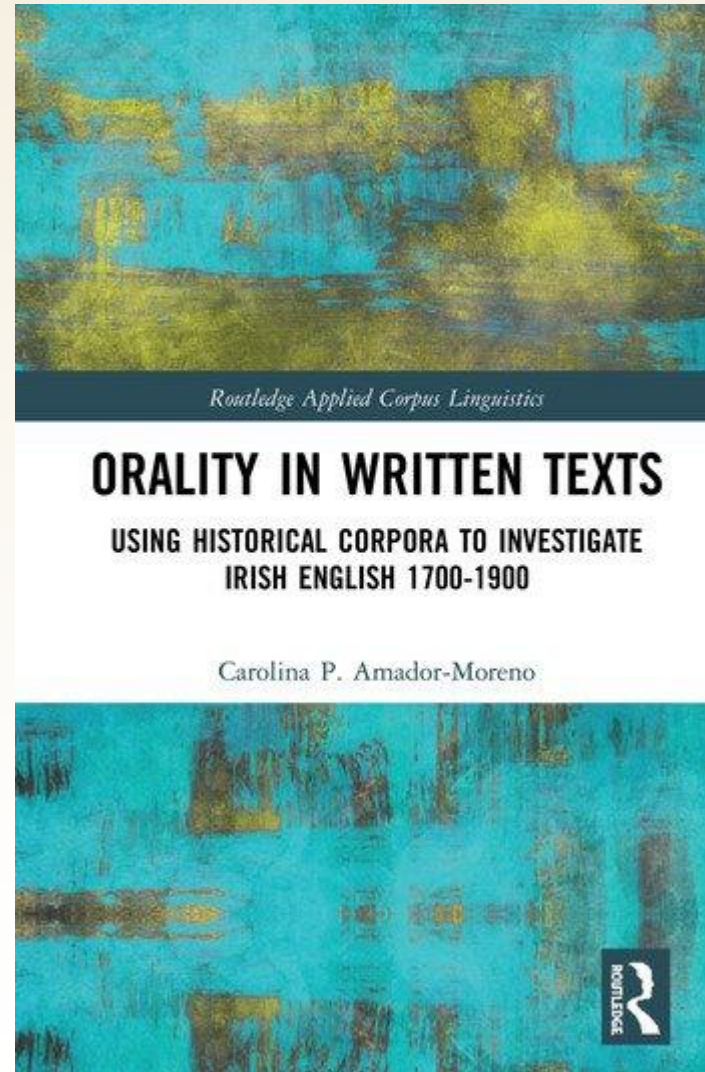


Some other relevant literature

The Language of Discovery, Exploration and Settlement



*Edited by
Nicholas Brownlees*



Many thanks, I hope the presentation provided you with some food for thought and I will gladly take any questions you might have.

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University of Limerick

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Website: www.raymondhickey.com