January at the Museum!

The woman top right is Annie Moore shortly before her death. The color picture is believed to be Annie and her brothers at Ellis Island on the morning of their arrival.

Annie Moore and Ellis Island

January: Happy New Year! Ellis Island and Immigration.

On January 1, 1892, 17-year-old Annie Moore from Cork, Ireland became the first immigrant to arrive at Ellis Island. Hustled ahead of a burly German by her two younger brothers and by an Irish longshoreman who shouted "Ladies first," Annie set foot on Ellis Island ahead of the other passengers from the steamship Nevada and was officially registered by the former private secretary to the secretary of the treasury, and presented with a $10 gold piece by the superintendent of immigration.

Until a few years ago, it was believed that Moore went on to Texas where she met an ultimately tragic end after being struck by a streetcar. This version of events was accepted even by Moore's own descendants until 2006 when genealogists determined that the unlucky Annie Moore of Texas was actually a different person bearing the same exact name. The Annie Moore who arrived in steerage and inaugurated Ellis Island initially joined her parents, who had arrived several years earlier, apparently in a five-story brick tenement at 32 Monroe Street in Manhattan, the Irish slums. At 21, she married Joseph Augustus Schayer and soon had the first of the eleven children she would bear over the next quarter of a century. Her first child died before his second birthday, but the next four were fortunate enough to make it to adulthood. And then things took a turn. Due to the family's living conditions and likely to Annie's own weakening health, only one of her final five children made it past the age of three, and the lone survivor died at 21. Even with the infant

only one of her final five children made it past the age of three, and the lone survivor died at 21. Even with the infant mortality rate in New York City at that time hovering around 34 per 100, it's apparent that the Schayer family suffered more than most, and though we might want to convince ourselves that such high loss rates must have better equipped parents to cope, it's not true. Frequency and familiarity did not render the death of a child any less painful than it is today.When she died of heart failure, aged 50, at her apartment on Cherry Street, she was said to have been so obese that firemen had to remove her body through an upstairs window. Her brother Anthony, who arrived with Annie and Philip on the Nevada, died in his 20's in the Bronx and was temporarily buried in potter's field. She lay in an unmarked grave in Calvary Cemetery, Queens, which was located in 2008 when a headstone was erected and dedicated to her.

Annie Moore's own life may have been tragic, but her gathered descendants, who included prosperous Dominican-, Chinese-, Jewish and Italian-Americans, are a testament both to the cultural melting pot of New York and to the American dream. Her living descendants include great-grandchildren, a great-nephew and a great-niece. One of the descendants is an investment counselor and another a Ph.D. Annie Moore came to America bearing little more than her dreams; she stayed to help build a country enriched by diversity.

The History of Immigration Laws in America.

Many, many more people were to follow in her footsteps. Between 1892 and 1954, 12 million people passed through Ellis Island, seeking a better life in the New World, marking one of the largest migrations in human history. About one third of the 325 million people who live in the United States are descended from immigrants who first entered the country through those famous halls. Immigration has been a perennial thorny issue in American society and politics, so I wanted to give you a brief run-down on the development and changes to immigration policy since Independence.

The issue of immigration is a very complicated one - and one that quite frankly, most Americans know very little about. A greencard (aka "lawful permanent residence") is very difficult to get, because there are really only a few narrow and often lengthy paths to those as of 2019 and most of them are unavailable to people who have ever been undocumented or out of status, and never would have been available to them before they came here. Citizenship is a complicated process too, because immigrants have to have been a greencard holder for at least five years (three if married to a U.S. citizen) before applying. For most of American history anyone present in the country (lawfully or otherwise) just needed to file a simple declaration of intent after two years and appear before a judge to be formally naturalized three years later. Government policy has a longstanding history in the United States of both embracing and keeping out immigrants, of reuniting families and tearing them apart.

If you are a third (and even sometimes second) generation American, your family almost certainly did not come with a visa. And even if they did, before 1965 it was as simple as applying for and receiving one from the general pool of available visas from your country when your number was up. People mention that their family had to get a sponsor and "did it the right way," but sponsorship involved a letter (and often not from an actual family member) and provided no enforceable guarantee that the immigrant would not become a burden - and it took advantage of chain migration, as people from families or villages came out specifically to take a job with someone they knew - a process that very few of today's immigrants can take advantage of. Either way, all of this was so totally different from today's system that "my family did it the right way" as a response to those who came without inspection or overstayed their visas as if that ends the argument is not productive or accurate. Furthermore, are your sure your family came the right way? Do you have copies of their papers? Many immigrants right into the 20th century did not actually become citizens. The "right way" was very often nothing more than going down and registering for citizenship after many years of unlawful (or at least unaccounted-for) presence and even then, the system was rife with fraud and abuse.

Just to clarify the history, before the late 1800s the U.S. had few immigration policies. The American Immigration Council (AIC) points out that it is impossible to judge where someone's ancestors who came here at that time did so "legally," because immigration was not federally regulated, so there were no laws to break. As the AIC notes, "most of our ancestors would not have qualified under today's immigration laws."

Officials in Ellis Island, which opened in 1892, were more concerned about immigrants arriving free of disease, and that they had enough cash so as not to be a "drain on the tax dollars." The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, was the first time the government prohibited specific ethnic groups from entering. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, set quotas on countries, strengthening restrictions on Chinese immigrants, as well as Southern and Eastern Europeans, Japanese, Indian, and other Asian peoples. It set up the first "consular control system," which required that visas be obtained abroad from a U.S. consulate before admission. The 1924 law also established the Border Patrol since restrictive laws had led to large numbers of unauthorized immigrants entering the country.

The Immigration Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, abolished the national-origins quota system of the Johnson-Reed Act, eliminating the discriminatory practice of denying immigration to the U.S. based on race, ancestry, or national origin. This Act resulted in a new wave of immigrants coming to this country from all over, but especially from China.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) signed by President Ronald Reagan, sanctioned and fined

employers for "knowingly" hiring undocumented immigrants. But the Act also provided amnesty to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants. Although in hindsight, the law is not considered a success, the amnesty it provided is seen today as one of the few benefits.

The Immigration Act of the 1990s raised the annual cap on immigration and revised the political ideological grounds for exclusion and deportation. It also allowed people coming from countries afflicted by natural disasters or armed conflict to be granted "temporary protected status." By the turn of the 21st century, immigration had become heavily linked to national security. Several programs and laws were passed singling out foreign-born Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians, as well as mandated improvements and tamper-resistant documents for entry, the prevention of obtaining a driver's license without proof of citizenship, and the building of an additional 850 miles of fences along the Mexico border.

By looking at the scope of our immigration history, we can see that it has moved like a pendulum, both for the benefit of and the disadvantage of immigrants. American history, from the very beginning, is one of inclusion and exclusion. With all this knowledge, we then become better prepared to answer the question: What does it mean to be an American, and who gets to make that decision for the nation? At what point does an immigrant truly become an American - the day of their naturalization ceremony or the day they arrived or the first day they start thinking of this country as "home"? And that is often a fraught concept for immigrants who are torn between two countries. It may not be until the second generation that these issues are resolved.

Americans often celebrate how previous waves of European immigrants contributed to the forging of modern American identity, and yet may shy away from the idea that more recent Asian, South American, Middle Eastern or African immigrants continue to help forge that identity. And celebrating previous contributions by immigrants to American identity calls into question the whole idea of "assimilation." Immigrants did not assimilate - they did not give up their old identity and adopt a new one, but actually helped to SHAPE American identity, which is, by definition, about freedom and diversity. Irish Catholics in the nineteenth century entered a hostile WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) environment - did they assimilate and adopt a similar attitude to their tormentors; or did they band together and carve out a space for themselves, often in opposition to the status quo? The numerous fraternal, religious, and cultural organizations that Irish communities established speak to their activism around protecting their identity.

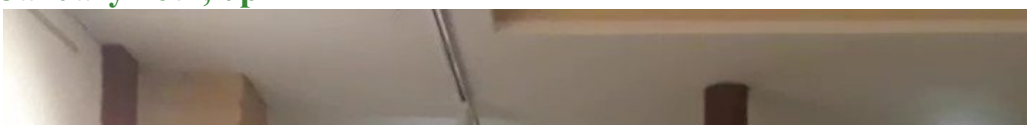
Historians, sociologists, linguists, and anthropologists all have documented the process of "assimilation" and how language acquisition is an evolving process for immigrants then and now. People who laud immigrants "back then" need to understand that Irish, German, Yiddish, Italian, and multiple other languages were spoken here, and it took immigrants time to learn a new language. I have heard hundreds of anecdotes in my time as an immigration historian about the grandmother who never really learned English. Most people understand that Nana would not have had the time for English classes, nor room in her tiny apartment to study. People know the work she had to do, cooking at a coal stove, boiling water for laundry while her children helped the younger ones with their homework. Did Nana feel embarrassed about her accent and ignorance? Or did she feel pride in her and her family's achievements? Perhaps both?

These stories help us confront misconceptions about immigrants past and present, and underline connections, both between past and present and those among us today. If you are an immigrant or the children of immigrants, your stories help us to trace common threads across cultures and realize how we all adapt old rituals to new environments. If you are the grandchild or great grandchild of immigrants or migrants, we realize memories may have faded somewhat, but we urge you to discover your stories and uncover their complexities.

We can't resolve today's political debates solely by sharing our family histories with each other, but we owe it to our ancestors to examine their lives not with sentimentality, but honesty. By the same standard, we owe it to today's immigrants, their modern-day counterparts, to think of them as real people, not stereotypes. The selflessness and drive of these individuals to sacrifice all that is familiar in order to build better lives for their children will continue to contribute to the character of our shared national identity. Their stories, and your stories, are our American story.

The Irish American Heritage Museum shares stories about our heritage and culture so that we can find a common understanding of the American Dream, whether that dream was realized in 1851 or 2019, or perhaps like Annie Moore, was never fully realized. We seek to inform our visitors about the stories of everyday immigrants who came here to make a new life for themselves. We hope that by learning of their dreams and the trials they endured or overcame, our visitors will contemplate what it means to be American. We encourage the sharing of stories, and the passing on of our culture and traditions, so that all Americans will see their own heritage as part of the American cultural mosaic.

Rambling House: Traditional Irish Music
Irish American Heritage Museum
Thursday January 16th, 7pm

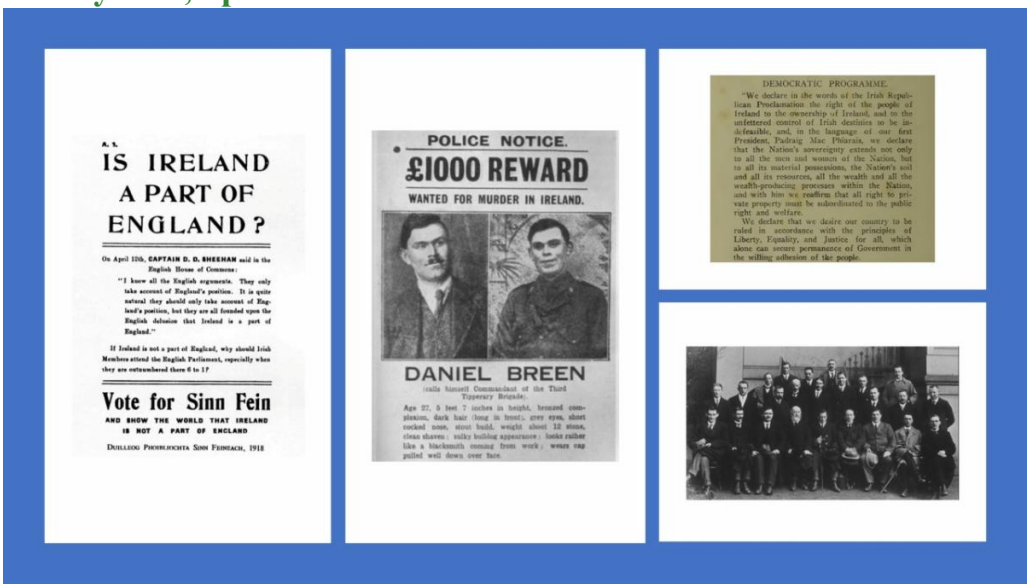


As usual, all are welcome to participate in this free evening of traditional Irish music and song brought to you by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (the Irish Musicians' Association). Bring your party piece or instrument! Audience participation welcome and encouraged by our friendly group. Hear traditional Irish music, and old songs, stories and poems in a traditional format that still happens in many Irish homes (and bars) today.

The motto of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is "ceol agus gaol" (music and kinship), and while headquartered in Ireland, there are branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann all over the world. Light refreshments will be provided.

Lecture Series: The Irish War of Independence
Lecture One: Election Promises and Political Reality 1919-1920
Irish American Heritage Museum

Tuesday January 21st, 7pm

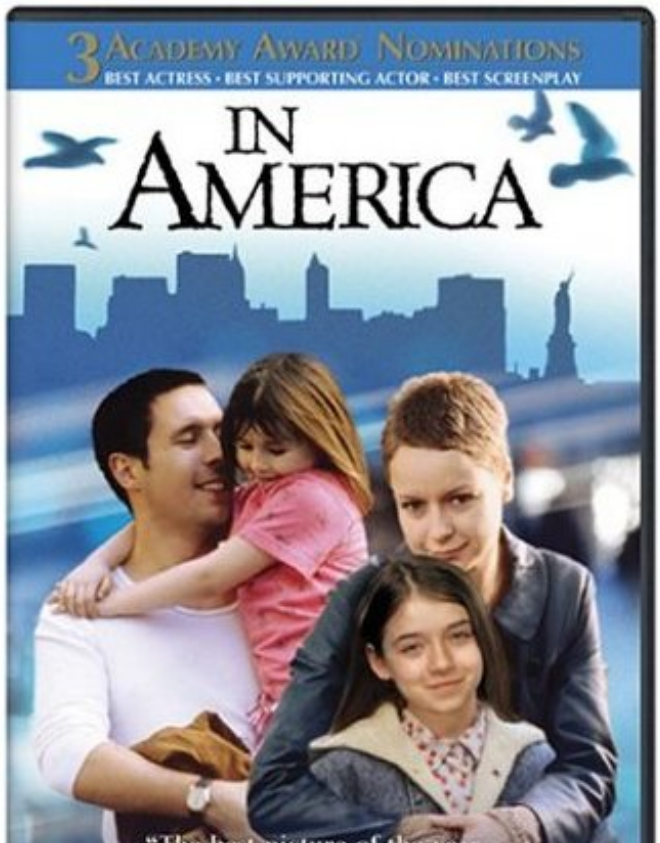


The first in a series of lectures which will discuss aspects of the War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War, Dr. Elizabeth

Stack will discuss the 1918 Election and the First Dail, as well as the beginning of the War of Independence. The 1918 election is now seen as a key moment in modern Irish history because it saw the overwhelming defeat of the moderate nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), which had dominated the Irish political landscape since the 1880s, and a landslide victory for the radical Sinn Féin party which had vowed in its manifesto to establish an independent Irish Republic.
The election was held in the aftermath of World War I, the Easter Rising and the Conscription Crisis. It was the first general election to be held after the Representation of the People Act 1918, so women over the age of 30, and all men over the age of 21, could vote.
In the aftermath of the elections, Sinn Féin's elected members refused to attend the British Parliament in Westminster (London), and instead formed a parliament in Dublin, the First Dáil Éireann ("Assembly of Ireland"), which declared Irish independence as a republic. The Irish War of Independence was conducted under this revolutionary government which sought international recognition, and set about the process of state-building.

Future topics presented will include the Black and Tans, De Valera in America, The Burning of Cork, Collins' Squad and the Cairo Gang, Bloody Sunday, and the Civil War.

Film Club: In America
Irish American Heritage Museum
Monday January 27th, 2pm and 7pm. $5.



In America is a 2002 drama directed by Jim Sheridan. The semi-autobiographical screenplay by Sheridan and his daughters, Naomi and Kirsten, focuses on an immigrant Irish family's struggle to start a new life in New York City, as seen through the eyes of the elder daughter. Set in 1982, Johnny and Sarah Sullivan and their daughters Christy and Ariel enter the United States on a tourist visa from Ireland via Canada, where Johnny was working as an actor. The family settles in New York City, in a rundown Hell's Kitchen tenement. Hanging over the family is the death of their five-year-old son Frankie, who died from a brain tumor. The devout Roman Catholic Johnny questions God and has lost any ability to feel true emotions, which has affected his relationship with his family. Christy believes she has been granted three wishes by her dead brother, which she only uses at times of near-dire consequences for the family as they try to survive in New York.

Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times observed, "In America is not unsentimental about its new arrivals (the movie has a warm heart and frankly wants to move us), but it is perceptive about the countless ways in which it is hard to be poor and a stranger in a new land." Claudia Puig of USA Today called it "touching, but not cloying, uplifting and hopeful but never sappy and also just plain funny. There is not a false note among the five core performances, nor a false word in Sheridan's script. In America is a classic story of losing and finding faith told with heart, humor and emotional heft."