HUNGER UPON THE LAND

By

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To the Memory of Sam Roberts, my father, and Dr. Joseph Fiducia, my husband
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad “Thousands are Sailing to Americay”</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hunger on the Land”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelude to Transcript</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide Presentation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide Presentation Bibliography</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I (Letter and Diary Excerpts)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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I owe thanks to my family in Templepatrick, Co. Antrim, especially my father, Sam Roberts, a great lover of history, who collected books, photographs and wonderful stories from Ulster for me over the years. Also, Pat and Ann Tanney, of Belfast, who added to my collection. Maire McPoland, of Belfast, for driving me to the wilds of Donegal to visit soup-kitchens and workhouses; Kate Coley, of Hartford, CT, who drove me from Shannon through Galway, Mayo and all the way to Roscommon to visit the Famine Museum in Strokestown.

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THOUSANDS ARE SAILING TO AMERICAY

You brave Irish heroes wherever you be
I pray stand a moment and listen to me
Your sons and fair daughters are not going away,
And thousands are sailing to Americay.

So good luck to those people and safe may they land,
They are leaving their country for a far distant strand,
They are leaving old Ireland, no longer can stay,
And thousands are sailing to Americay.

The night before leaving they are bidding goodbye,
And it's early next morning their heart gives a sigh,
They do kiss their mothers and then they will say 'Farewell, dear old father, we must now go away.'

Their friends and relations and neighbours also,
When the trunks are all packed up, all ready to go,
O' the tears from their eyes they fall down like the rain,
And the horses are prancing, going off for the train.

(The traditional ballad, first sung after the Great Famine.)
Ireland and her people have suffered greatly since the period of the Elizabethan conquests. This suffering, degradation and oppression continued with Oliver Cromwell’s rape and plunder of this little island. As a direct result of Cromwell’s policy, the native Catholic population, those who were not slaughtered in 1649, were forced to leave their beloved homes and land and move west of the Shannon River, to Connaught, the most barren and desolate part of Ireland. Cromwell’s never to be forgotten cry was “to hell or Connaught.”

Cromwell combined religious bigotry with total ruthlessness. He slaughtered all those who opposed him. Those who not were forced to leave their homes and take their followers across the Shannon... The Great Protector then handed over most of the best estates in the midland and eastern counties to his own followers and, by the time the blood had congealed, about eighty per cent of Irish land was in Protestant hands.1

In the 1840’s, roughly one hundred and fifty years ago, after 400 years of English domination, these were the people, the native Catholic population, who lived in wretched poverty. One of the chief causes of this misery was bad relations between landlord and tenant. Landlords, people who owned the land, usually with many “encumbrances,” were mostly English and resided out of Ireland. They left the running of their vast estates to agents or ‘middlemen’. These managers held absolute power and their ability was measured by the amount of money they could extract from the rented land.

The relation between landlord and tenant is, in truth, lost; in no country in the world are these duties less recognized than in Ireland.... The embarrassed landlord has, of course, no money to expend upon improvements; his apparent interest is to extort the highest possible rent from the estate.2

(Slides of land 1-10)
At this time these Irish peasants married very early in life and produced many children. The diet of potatoes and buttermilk proved to be a healthy one, and women were very fertile. Over-population, with other problems such as unsuccessful land reform, tenure laws and inheritance patterns, led to sub-division which caused a much larger problem. As the children married, usually as young as fourteen or fifteen years of age, they each received a portion of their father’s rented land. Poor tenants, who originally owned five acres, ended up with as little as a quarter of an acre. All this sub-letting and sub-division resulted in diminished holdings and a dependence on the potato. One acre of poor ground on mountain or stony land could yield six tons of potatoes. This would be enough to feed six adults for a year. Any other crops grown would be sold to pay the middleman rent, and the large families would subsist on their crop of potatoes.

Low as the condition of the cottier or labourer, whose labour merely pays the rent of his cabin and potato-garden, there is yet a lower class; those who, having no certain employment, are obliged to pay a money rent for their wretched cabin, and for the land in con-acre, and whose subsistence depends on the success of their crop. If they fail, they have no resource; they have no alternative but to beg, or steal or starve.

So, these were the people, roughly six million of the country’s nine million, who subsisted on produce grown on these tiny plots of land. The potato was the only crop that could have borne the burden of feeding so many people on so little land. The cattle and sheep grazed in Ireland, and pigs fed there were not to be eaten in Ireland, but sent to Britain for the consumption of their industrial population or the people of the British colonies.

(Slides 11-15)
The Irish peasant was forced to live in this type of ‘hovel’ because any improvements that were made resulted in a further increase in rent. Tenants were ‘tenants-at-will’ and could be thrown off the land at the end of a growing year. Between ‘rent-racking’ (increases in rent) and insecurity, the poorer peasants were put in a very precarious position. Tithes also had to be paid to the Protestant Church of Ireland for its maintenance, even though 75% of the population was Catholic.

Life was a matter of day-to-day existence—the climate although damp, was mild. They had plenty of turf (peat) to burn in their hearths for heat and cooking, and as long as they had the potato in abundance, they could eat. An adult man consumed as much as 14 pounds of potatoes a day. With buttermilk and cabbage as supplements, this diet was quite nutritious and provided adequate vitamins. Travelers in Ireland before the Great Famine years noted how tall, strong and healthy the people were.

When I see the people of a country in spite of political oppression with well formed vigorous bodies, and their cottages swarming with children, when I see their men athletic and their women beautiful, I know not how to believe them subsisting on an unwholesome food.

However, Arthur Young and other economists and agriculturists did remark often that the system of subdividing was not good and could lead to dire consequences in the coming years. There was great danger in England’s policies with Ireland. While Protestant Ireland was building and exporting at a hectic pace, nothing in the way of improvements for farming or industry was being done where the Catholic poor population needed it most. The vast poverty-stricken Catholics were out of sight and out of mind to the English government and landlords. Survival for these people simply depended on a healthy potato crop and if it failed for any length of time, it would be a catastrophe.
In their small one-roomed cabins there was little housework to do. Cooking was done on a pot over the open turf fire. When the weather was dry, the families spent long hours outside. Usually, the weather in Ireland is mild, and from May until September, bright until eleven at night. Because the potato culture required little labor during the months between planting in February and harvesting in November, the male population migrated to England and Scotland during this time period, while the women ran the households and took care of large families. In the clachans (small villages), people were really quite self-sufficient. They helped each other and enjoyed the closeness of neighbours. Despite the poverty, these clachans were cultural centers and usually had traditional musicians, singers, poets and story-tellers. At night, people would get together. The fiddler would strike a note and all would join in the merry-making. "Thus, in the clachans the Irish peasants could preserve their ancient customs and beliefs in a world apart from the 'big houses' of their landlords and the ever watchful eyes of government officials."5

(Slides 16-26) Talk about contrasts in Irish societies at that period.

Now, Ulster in the northeastern part of the country was quite different. Belfast was, in the 1800's, the linen capital of the world. The industrial revolution had reached here and people worked in the mills and earned money to spend on food. However, farming communities did experience a loss of their potato crop. One newspaper reported:
Of 285 looms in the neighbourhood, the Whig's correspondent states that 164 are idle, and that it is very probable the remainder will soon be idle also, and that the people have nothing past them to live on. This mass of human misery is on the fertile estate of the Marquis of Hertford, an absentee landlord, who abstracts not less than seventy thousand yearly from Ireland. (The Vindicator, Belfast, 22 April 1846)

Laborers in the mills were not totally dependent on potatoes only for food; nevertheless, there was little else for poor families to eat.

(Slides 27-36)

In August of 1845, the outlook for the potato crop was excellent. People gave a sigh of relief as reports of a potato failure, which, ironically, started in America, spread to Europe and England, but by great fortune, passed by Ireland. A failure would be serious enough for England, but for Ireland it would be a disaster. However, by the third week in October, news came pouring in from all over Ireland of extensive failures in the staple food of the country. In the west of Ireland, especially, there was panic. The poorest families almost starved themselves to use their food supply for seed for the next year's crop, but that was useless. In the spring of 1846, it became apparent that the new crop was also diseased. It seemed to these people that almost overnight their only food had become a mass of pulp and slime, unfit to be eaten by man or beast.

A mist rose up out of the sea, and you could hear a voice talking near a mile off across the stillness of the earth. It was the same for three days or more, and then when the fog lifted, you could begin to see the tops of the potato stalks lying over as if the life was gone out of them. And that was the beginning of the great trouble and famine that destroyed Ireland. (As an elderly farmer described the strange events of August 1845.)
What was it, this mysterious disease that was to change the course of history in not only Ireland, but in that land of dreams across the sea – America? Blight, was the simple name that it was given, but, actually, it was a fungus disease now known as “Phytophthora infestans.” It first appears as brown or black spots on the leaves of the potato plant with a greyish fungal growth spreading under the leaves to the stocks. With the mild, wet weather of that 1845 Irish summer, it spread very quickly.

We stop the press with very great regret to announce that the potato murrain has unequivocally declared itself in Ireland. The crops about Dublin are suddenly perishing . . . Where will Ireland be in the event of a universal potato rot? (Dr. Lindley, Editor, Gardeners’ Chronicle, Sept. 12, 1949.)

Dr. Lindley asked an important question. Indeed, what would happen to a country whose majority of people subsisted on that one crop? No one could stop the fire-like spread, which resulted that year in a 60% loss. By May of 1846, plantings had been reduced, and by August, the whole crop was totally destroyed.

The people had begun to starve, they were now eating anything which could be devoured -- food that stank, nettles that stung and even diseased potatoes which caused great sickness. With the total failure of the crop that year, all hope disappeared. A winter set in, not a normal winter, but the harshest and longest in living memory. There was no food left. All clothing and furniture had been sold, and now a terrible fear seized the famished people. To make things worse, a fever epidemic spread like wildfire through the country.

(Slides 37-43)
Robert Peel (1788-1850), who was British Prime Minister at the time, ordered all sorts of reports on the blight and did what he thought was his best to help. His importing corn into Ireland the first year of the famine probably kept many from total destitution, but not enough was done to help England’s closest neighbour. England really did not understand the Irish culture and problems of the Irish people. Poor Law rules that perhaps worked well for the English poor, were not successful in Ireland. As the government refused to take responsibility for feeding the masses of starving people during the first two years of the famine, soup kitchens were opened and run willingly by the Quakers. They set up a network of organizations to help throughout Ireland, and by 1849 when they closed down, they had raised $200,000, half of which had been contributed by United States citizens.

As well as distributing food, clothing and crop seeds the Quakers sought to encourage industry and improve agriculture. The developed fishing stations at Achill, Ballinakill... and helped fishermen from other regions redeem fishing gear which had been pawned or sold during periods of bad weather or outside the fishing season.11

Finally, the third year of the famine, the government started to operate soup kitchens on a massive scale, but the soup was usually thin stirabout sometimes served with a piece of bread.

Alexis Soyer, a chef at the Reform Club in London, will be forever remembered in Ireland for his infamous recipe. His ‘Model Kitchen’ charged the wealthy five shillings to see the poor eat!

... ‘five shillings each’ were to be given in charity, the poor unfortunates who earned them with scalding tears and bitter humiliation and galling shame were not forgotten; and that on this occasion they were presented, when the performance was over, with something more than a “fine cake”!12
As the dreadful hunger continued and the whole situation became worse, tenants who normally paid their rent, now could not do so. The landlords eager to clear their property of non-paying tenants, evicted them. Large detachments of troops were called in to help evict the families.

This is a sketch of Bridget O'Donnell, and a report from the "Illustrated London News, Dec. 1849":

She lived near Kilrush, a small seaport on the Shannon estuary in the west of Ireland. In December 1849 she was destitute, and the landlord wanted the land, and to be rid of his wretched tenants. Her husband used to have four and a half acres of land and three acres of bog. They had been put out because they owed rent, and their crop of oats had been taken. Her husband had gone and she was alone with two children. She was about to have another baby and had gone back to the cottage. This is what happened then: Dan Sheedey and five or six men came to tumble my house; they wanted me to give possession. I said that I would not; I had fever, and was within two months of my down-lying; they commenced knocking down the house.

As friends and neighbors of the evicted were not allowed by law to give them shelter, the poor creatures would seek refuge in what was call a "scalpeen". A hole was dug in the earth, two or three feet deep or so, this was roofed over with sticks and pieces of turf (scalp, was the top of the grass), and in this burrow a family sheltered from the elements.
In time, of course, these shelters were discovered by the landlords or managers and torn down. The evicted and their large families were then put out on the road to survive as best they could. Mr. James Mahony, an artist from Cork, was employed by the Irish newspapers to sketch and report scenes. Ireland’s roads and towns filled up with the masses of starving people who resembled skeletons more than humans.

“I started from Cork, by the mail (says our informant), for Skibbereen and saw little until we came to Clonakilty, where the coach stopped for breakfast; and here for the first time, the horrors of the poverty became visible, in the vast number of famished poor, who flocked around to beg alms: amongst them was a woman carrying in her arms the corpse of a fine child, and making the most distressing appeal to the passengers for aid to enable her to purchase a coffin and bury her dear little baby.”14 (ILN. Feb. 1847)

Now, to add to the misery and suffering, another horror appeared. Fever and diseases such as typhus, cholera and dysentery spread around the country and affected great numbers of already weakened people. Deaths occurred so rapidly that in a short time only “trap” (re-usable) coffins were used. Funerals all but stopped, and people worried who would be left with the strength to bury them. Numerous dead were just thrown in pits, one on top of the other, with little soil to cover them. Often, starving dogs ate the corpse.

Sadly, we must never forget that Ireland had really no shortage of food. Only the potato crop had failed, but to three-quarters of the population, the potato that was the crop they depended on for their lives. Amazingly, the export of livestock was high during this terrible time in Ireland, while at the same time, Belgium and Holland, who also experienced potato crop failures, avoided famine by halting exportation of food.

(Slides 56-63)
In addition, the food depots were filled with corn, but the government would not release it until all the food in the shops had been sold because of the 'laissez faire' policy. Where did the government expect the hungry poor to find money to buy the food, even at reduced prices? In many places, the people desperate for something to eat attacked the depots and took what they could find. This prompted violence and food riots in several places.

In 1847, the British government made the decision not to supply food in the event of another crop failure and passed the burden on maintaining the poorhouses onto the shoulders of the landlords, through raised rates. It is a fact, that even if the landlords had paid their assessed share of operating these houses, it still was not enough to cover the cost of feeding the poor. While the landlords were not entirely blameless during this terrible time, the fault lies mainly with a government that did not take responsibility for a people it had reduced to poverty and dependence.

Indeed, it would seem that between the government and landlords, there was a private battle going on and the starving Irish peasants were absolutely inconsequential. Whether it involved evictions or upkeep of workhouses, the government blamed the landlords, and the landlords believed that the responsibility belonged to the English government.

In 1838 under the Poor Law Act, 130 workhouses were opened all over Ireland. These were built to shelter and feed the destitute, old and insane. However, few people ever resided in them as conditions were so harsh and the Board of Guardians who ran them showed little kindness to anyone under their care. Even in 1846, there were less than 45,000 people living in these institutions. Now, as the potato crop failed a second year and
the population of “distressed” people grew larger, these dreaded workhouses filled to overflowing. According to John Keating, by the year 1848, there were approximately 130,000 inmates; 1849, 190,000; and a peak of 217,000 in 1851.\textsuperscript{15}

In Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal, the workhouse, grim and towering above the wild and chilling ocean, took pride in being better than others. This was mainly because of good landlords and clergy who took an active interest in them. For example, a traveler’s report showed:

> We found the poor house in excellent order and the inmates appeared to be in good health. The diet was 17 oz. of oat and Indian meal mixed half and half with three-quarters a quart of buttermilk daily for the able bodied, varied with rice twice a week.\textsuperscript{16}

However, to show just how varied conditions of workhouses were, a report of the workhouse in neighboring Glenties reported:

> We visited the poor house at Glenties, which is in a dreadful state; the people were, in fact, half-starved and half-clothed. The day before, they had one meal of oatmeal and water, and at the time of our visit had not sufficient food in the house for the day’s supply . . . Their bedding consisted of dirty straw, in which they were laid in the rows on the floor; and we did not see blanket at all. The rooms are hardly bearable for filth. The living and dying were stretched side by side beneath the same miserable covering.\textsuperscript{17}

(Slides 64-81)

The people felt that the only and obvious way out of this nightmare was death, but for some time there had been another - emigration! People were leaving from every port in Ireland; in the course of 1847, some quarter of a million Irish men, women and little children left their homeland forever. At first the younger, stronger, single people left, but as the famine continued, whole families, young and very old, weak and sick, sold whatever they could to pay the fare to either Canada or America. Many of the poorest never got
beyond the English port from which they hoped to sail. By mid-May 1847, there were over
100,000 Irish people begging and destitute about the streets of Liverpool and other northern
English towns.18

In their desperation to flee Ireland, there was little thought given to what was ahead, the only thing on their minds now was escape, to leave this land of starvation, fever and
death. To the question asked by the British army recruiting officer, “Where are all the
strong young men?”, the old woman answered, “Sure, they are all dead or gone to
America”.19

“Waiting for the train”, the beautiful painting by Erskine Nichols, conveys more
than words could say. It shows the deep sadness of two young people leaving their homes
for the first time. Most emigrants, especially the poorest, left from the great City of
Liverpool, England, because of the cheaper fare -- £4 to America and £3 to Canada. The
quick and unrealistic medical examination required before sailing was ridiculous.
Emigrants went in one door and out another. Sometimes there were only three doctors to
“examine” as many as 3,000 emigrants in one day. If a person could stand up, he was
considered fit, so consequently, sickness and fevers were brought onboard with the masses
of people.

Slides (82-92)

Filled with shock and sadness at what they were leaving, those waiting to make the
voyage gave little thought to the difficulties that they would face on the “coffin ships”.

Five thousand ships sailed across the Atlantic with Irish emigrants in the six
years of Famine emigration. Ships were diverse in size, safety and comfort,
or the lack of it, and they varied in many other respects - in age and in the
experience and quality of their crew, their speed on the voyage, provisions on board and the fares they charged.20

Even boarding the packet ship was not a simple matter of walking up the gang-plank. Steerage passengers suffered greatly and were treated worse than animals. Men, women and little children had to scramble up the sides of the ship, and frequently someone fell into the water. This happened because the captain would not permit the passengers aboard until the cargo was stowed in the hole. The cargo was important; the lives of the emigrants worth nothing.

Many of these packet ships were owned by unscrupulous men who took advantage of the bad situation to make huge profits. Often five or six hundred people were squeezed into spaces originally intended for animals and grain. Quite often a ship sank after only a short time at sea. In August of 1848, the Ocean Monarch, a 1,300-ton vessel, burned in the Mersey, only 25 miles from Liverpool, with the loss of 176 lives. A cartoon of the 1800’s shows just how much value was placed on an emigrant’s life -- “Man in the water: help! or I'll perish.” One of the crew shouts, “Row on Jem, never mind him, he’s only a passenger.”21 Even at the beginning of the Great Famine emigrant shipping trade, steerage passengers were treated badly.

(92-103)

Once on board, the passengers had to crowd on the deck to listen to a roll call. If any stowaways were found, they were in grave trouble. One of the mates and some crew would go below with lanterns and long poles to poke around the dark corners of the hold to search for the poor creatures that would be hiding. If found, they were often tarred and
feathered and made to work their passage. One can understand, then, that the cruelty could only grow worse with the tremendous profits being made on this new trade venture. The writer Nathaniel Hawthorne stated, disgustedly, Irish emigrants were "as numerous as maggots in cheese." Steerage passengers suffered from not only terrible living conditions, but also from cruel treatment doled out by a rough crew. It was common for frightened, weak emigrants to be brutally beaten or have their food and water rations cut. In bad weather, they were locked in the dark hold for days while the ship tossed and turned. Stephen de Vere, a well-known philanthropist and landowner from Co. Limerick, traveled as a steerage passenger and reported:

Before the emigrant has been a week at sea, he is an altered man. How can it be otherwise? Hundreds of poor people, men, women and children, of all ages, from the drivelling idiot of ninety to the babe just born, huddled together without light, without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart, the fevered patients lying between the sound, in sleeping places of narrow as almost to deny them the power of indulging, by a change of position, the natural restlessness of the disease...

One can see that going to America was not an easy matter for these children of the Great Famine. The journey took between six to ten weeks. They were jammed into rat-infested holes, where sick and terrified, they stayed for the long voyage. Their willingness to travel in these "coffin" ships is an indication of just how desperate the situation was in Ireland.

Slides (104-109)

The Irish made the best of what they had, as they had done in bad times at home. At the beginning of the journey, they helped each other and tried to preserve any good
memories they could muster to keep up a little cheer. Of course, as the weeks passed and food and water became short, anything of value was sold to the sailors for favours. These people loved to tell stories and sing and dance, and it was often reported that the very last treasure to be sold was the fiddle. The dreadful conditions of so many ships prompted a reporter for the London Times to write that “The ‘Black Hole of Calcutta’ was a blessing compared to what the poor Irish Emigrant had to deal with”.25

(Slides 88-91)

After the long ocean voyage, the immigrants arrived weak, ill and quite unprepared for what met them in New York. There was no Ellis Island or even Castle Gardens to welcome them in this early period. Ships docked in South Street named ‘the street of ships, or Water Street which was close by. Many were so frightened of the city and confused with all the excitement that they stayed for years in the neighborhood around the docks. Al Smith’s grandparents, the Mulvehills, who came in 1841, settled in Water Street, just a few blocks from where they landed. Here they produced a grandson who ran as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1928. The Mulvehills’ behavior was typical for those who had little money to travel any farther.

Slides (92-95)

Some of the newly arrived were fortunate to have a relative or friend to meet them, employment was arranged and decent lodgings found in the Irish neighbourhoods. Those who arrived alone, without help, faced the ‘runners’ who completely overwhelmed them.

The purpose of the runners was to rob the emigrants, which they did in four
wants. First, by simply stealing whatever the opportunity offered. Second, by seizing luggage, carrying it willy-nilly to a boarding house, and there demanding with menaces a great fee for a service which the emigrant had not wanted and could have done for himself. Third, by taking a cut from the boarding house owner for bringing him customers. Fourth by selling river, canal, or railroad tickets to take emigrants to the interior. This was much the most profitable line of business, much more so than stealing heavy trunks containing rags.26

Slides (110-118)

The Irish of these Great Famine years left a land of utter desolation, and the trauma of the experience held many from achieving prosperity in the New World. It would take years for these sons and daughters of Erin to gain acceptance in America. Indeed, the English would again regard them with aversion and contempt, now in the form of Yankee domination.

Poor, unskilled and utterly unequipped for city life, these Irish people arrived in the midst of America’s anti-Catholic, anti-Irish period. Their assimilation would take many long years, but, in the end, they would be successful. They would use their power in numbers to enter politics and their power in muscle to build America. These “people of the soil” in Ireland would become “people of the cities” in their adopted country. Always loyal to America, they would forever keep Ireland in their hearts.
Notes


3. Ibid., p. 18.


8. Kirby Miller, Paul Wagner, Out of Ireland, p. 27.


13. Terry Coleman, Going to America, p.32.


17. Ibid. p. 128.


22. Ibid. p.83


24. Terry Coleman, Going to America, p. 120.


26. Terry Coleman, Going to America, p. 222-223.
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Newspapers


THE PRESENTATION WILL BEGIN WITH A SHORT SURVEY OF IRISH HISTORY BEGINNING WITH ST. PATRICK 432 A.D. AND ENDING WITH EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE GREAT FAMINE. FOLLOWING THIS, I WILL BEGIN THE SHOWING OF SLIDES 1-118.

SOFT BACKGROUND MUSIC WILL BE PLAYED DURING THE SLIDE SHOWING.

THE FOLLOWING TRANSCRIPT IS A BASE FOR READING ALONG WITH THE INDIVIDUAL SLIDES OR A GROUP OF SIMILAR SLIDES. I MAY CHANGE THE DIALOGUE TO SUIT MY AUDIENCE.

FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION, THERE WILL BE A QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD TO DISCUSS THE CONTENTS FURTHER.
IRELAND AND HER PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED GREATLY SINCE THE PERIOD OF ELIZABETHAN CONQUESTS. THIS SUFFERING, DEGREGATION AND OPPRESSION CONTINUED WITH OLIVER CROMWELL'S RAPE AND PLUNDER OF THIS LITTLE ISLAND.

AS A DIRECT RESULT OF CROMWELL'S POLICY, THE NATIVE, CATHOLIC POPULATION, THOSE THAT WERE NOT SLAUGHTERED IN 1649, WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR BELOVED HOMES AND LAND AND MOVE WEST OF THE SHANNON, TO CONNAUGHT, THE MOST BARREN AND DESOLATE PART OF IRELAND. CROMWELL'S NEVER-TO-BE FORGOTTEN CRY, WAS "TO HELL OR CONNAUGHT".

IN THE 1840s, ROUGHLY 150 YEARS AGO, AFTER 400 YEARS OF ENGLISH DOMINATION, THESE, THEN WERE THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN WRETCHED POVERTY. ONE OF THE CHIEF CAUSES OF THIS MISERY WAS BAD RELATIONS BETWEEN LANDLORDS AND TENANTS.

LANDLORDS, THE PEOPLE WHO OWNED THE LAND, USUALLY WITH MANY SO-CALLED ENCUMBRANCES, WERE MOSTLY ENGLISH AND RESIDED OUT OF IRELAND. THEY LEFT THE RUNNING OF THEIR VAST ESTATES TO AGENTS OR 'MIDDLEMEN'. THESE PEOPLE HELD ABSOLUTE POWER AND THEIR ABILITY WAS MEASURED BY THE AMOUNT OF MONEY THEY COULD EXTRACT FROM THE LEASED LAND.

AT THIS TIME, THE PEASANTS MARRIED VERY EARLY IN LIFE AND PRODUCED MANY CHILDREN. THEIR DIET OF POTATOES AND BUTTERMILK PROVED TO BE A HEALTHY ONE AND WOMEN WERE VERY FERTILE. INDEED, OVERPOPULATION WITH OTHER PROBLEMS SUCH AS UNSUCCESSFUL LAND REFORM, TENURE LAWS AND INHERITANCE PATTERNS LED TO SUB-DIVISION OF LAND WHICH CAUSED A MUCH LARGER PROBLEM.

AS THE CHILDREN MARRIED, USUALLY AS YOUNG AS FOURTEEN OR FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE, THEY EACH
RECEIVED A PORTION OF THEIR FATHER'S RENTED LAND. SO THAT POOR TENANTS WHO ORIGINALLY LEASED FIVE ACRES, ENDED UP WITH AS LITTLE AS A QUARTER OF AN ACRE. ALL THIS SUB-LETTING AND DIVIDING RESULTED IN DIMINISHED HOLDINGS - A LAND AND A PEOPLE UTTERLY DEPENDANT ON ONE CROP - THE POTATO.

ONE ACRE OF POOR GROUND ON HILLY MOUNTAIN, WET BOGLAND OR EVEN STONY LAND, COULD YIELD SIX TONS OF POTATOES! THIS WOULD BE ENOUGH TO FEED SIX ADULTS FOR A YEAR. ANY OTHER CROPS GROWN WOULD BE SOLD TO PAY THE RENT AND THE LARGE FAMILIES WOULD SUBSIST ON THEIR CROP OF POTATOES.

SO, THESE WERE THE PEOPLE, ROUGHLY SIX MILLION OF THE COUNTRY'S NINE MILLION, WHO SUBSISTED ON PRODUCE GROWN ON THESE TINY PLOTS OF LAND. THE POTATO WAS THE ONLY CROP THAT COULD HAVE BORNE THE BURDEN OF FEEDING SO MANY PEOPLE ON SO LITTLE LAND. THE CATTLE AND SHEEP GRAZED IN IRELAND AND THE PIGS FED THERE, WERE NOT TO BE EATEN IN IRELAND, BUT SENT TO BRITAIN FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF HER INDUSTRIAL POPULATION OR THE PEOPLE OF THE BRITISH COLONIES.

THE IRISH PEASANT WAS FORCED TO LIVE IN THIS TYPE OF HOVEL BECAUSE ANY IMPROVEMENTS THAT WERE MADE, RESULTED IN A FURTHER INCREASE OF RENT. TENANTS WERE "TENANTS-AT-WILL", AND COULD BE THROWN OFF THE LAND AT THE END OF A GROWING YEAR. BETWEEN 'RENT-RACKING' (INCREASES IN RENT) AND INSECURITY, THE POORER PEASANTS WERE PUT IN A DREADFUL POSITION. TITHES ALSO HAD TO BE PAID TO THE PROTESTANT CHURCH OF IRELAND, FOR ITS MAINTENANCE, EVEN THOUGH 75% OF THE POPULATION WAS CATHOLIC.

LIFE WAS A MATTER OF DAY TO DAY EXISTENCE, THE CLIMATE ALTHOUGH DAMP, WAS MILD. THEY HAD PLENTY OF TURF TO BURN IN THEIR HEARTHS, FOR HEAT AND COOKING, AND AS LONG AS THEY HAD THE POTATO IN ABUNDANCE, THEY COULD EAT. AN ADULT MAN CONSUMED AS MUCH AS 14 LBS. OF POTATOES A DAY!
WITH BUTTERMILK AND PERHAPS CABBAGE AS SUPPLEMENTS, THIS DIET WAS QUITE NUTRITIOUS AND PROVIDED ADEQUATE VITAMINS. TRAVELLERS IN IRELAND, BEFORE THE GREAT FAMINE YEARS, NOTED HOW TALL, STRONG AND HEALTHY-LOOKING THE PEOPLE WERE.

THIS WOULD BE THE INSIDE OF A TYPICAL COTTIER'S HOME, WHICH USUALLY CONSISTED OF ONE ROOM, SERVING AS KITCHEN, LIVING AND SLEEPING QUARTERS.

THIS SLIDE SHOWS THE HOME OF PRESIDENT MCKINLEY'S ANCESTORS IN ULSTER. NO DOUBT, THIS FAMILY WAS "WELL-OFF". NOTE THE BETTER INTERIOR, FURNITURE, WOODEN FLOORS AND WINDOW.

THIS SHOWS THE INTERIOR OF A SMALL FARMER'S HOME. ONE CAN SEE THE BUTTER CHURN AND ROUGH FURNITURE. ACTUALLY ALL THESE HOMES ARE MUCH BETTER THAN THE MUD CABINS THAT THE MAJORITY OF PEASANTS LIVED IN. MOST, AS THESE SKETCHES SHOW, DID NOT EVEN HAVE A CHIMNEY. THEY WERE SMOKEY AND DARK BUT PROVIDED SHELTER FROM THE RAIN. PEAT BURNING IN THE HEARTH KEPT THE FAMILY WARM AND PROVIDED A WAY TO COOK. IT IS NO WONDER THAT THE FAMILY GATHERED AROUND THE FIRE TO NOT ONLY COOK AND EAT, BUT TO SLEEP WITH THEIR PRECIOUS PIG AND ANY OTHER ANIMALS THAT THEY WERE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE.


AS THESE NEXT FEW SLIDES SHOW, BELFAST WAS A LARGE INDUSTRIAL CITY. PEOPLE WORKED IN THE MILLS AND THEY TOO, LIVED IN POVERTY. THEY DID
NOT DEPEND ON ONLY POTATOES, BUT OTHER FOOD WAS EXPENSIVE AND THE POTATO, WHEN PLENTIFUL, WAS CHEAP.


THIS IS AN EARLY SKETCH OF CLIFTON STREET CHARITABLE ASSOCIATION - COMMONLY KNOWN AS "CARRICK-HILL POOR HOUSE". IT WAS BUILT BY BELFAST BUSINESSMEN IN 1735 AND STILL REMAINS TODAY, AS AN OLD PEOPLES' HOME.

IN AUGUST 1845, THE OUTLOOK FOR THE POTATO CROP WAS EXCELLENT. PEOPLE GAVE A SIGH OF RELIEF AS REPORTS OF A POTATO FAILURE, WHICH IRONICALLY ENOUGH, HAD STARTED IN AMERICA, SPREAD TO EUROPE AND ENGLAND, BUT BY GREAT FORTUNE, PASSED BY IRELAND. A FAILURE WOULD BE SERIOUS ENOUGH FOR ENGLAND, BUT FOR IRELAND, IT WOULD BE A DISASTER.

HOWEVER, BY THE THIRD WEEK IN OCTOBER, NEWS CAME POURING IN FROM ALL OVER IRELAND OF EXTENSIVE FAILURES IN THE STAPLE FOOD OF THE COUNTRY. IN THE WEST OF IRELAND, ESPECIALLY, THERE WAS PANIC.
BY THE END OF THE YEAR THE POOREST COTTIERS HAD ALMOST STARVED THEMSELVES IN ORDER TO USE THEIR FOOD SUPPLY FOR SEED FOR THE NEXT YEAR'S CROP, BUT IT WAS USELESS. IN THE SPRING OF 1846, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE NEW CROP WAS ALSO DISEASED WITH A FUNGUS (PHYTOPHTHORA INFESTANS), QUITE UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME. IT SEEMED TO THE RURAL PEOPLE OF IRELAND THAT ALMOST OVERNIGHT THEIR ONLY FOOD HAD BECOME A MASS OF PULP AND SLIME, UNFIT TO BE EATEN BY MAN OR BEAST. A MIST ROSE UP OUT OF THE SEA, AND YOU COULD HEAR A VOICE TALKING NEAR A MILE OFF ACROSS THE STILLNESS OF THE EARTH. IT WAS THE SAME FOR THREE DAYS OR MORE, AND THEN WHEN THE FOG LIFTED, YOU COULD BEGIN TO SEE THE TOPS OF THE POTATO STALKS LYING OVER AS IF THE LIFE WAS GONE OUT OF THEM. AND THAT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT TROUBLE AND FAMINE THAT DESTROYED IRELAND. (AN ELDERLY FARMER DESCRIBED THE STRANGE EVENTS OF AUG. '45) WHAT WAS IT, THIS MYSTERIOUS DISEASE THAT WAS TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF HISTORY IN, NOT ONLY IRELAND, BUT IN THAT LAND ACCROSS THE SEA - AMERICA? BLIGHT, WAS THE SIMPLE NAME THAT IT WAS GIVEN BUT ACTUALLY IT WAS A FUNGAL DISEASE, KNOWN TODAY AS "PHYTOPHTHORA INFESTANS". IT FIRST APPEARS AS BROWN OR BLACK SPOTS ON THE LEAVES OF THE POTATO PLANT WITH A GREYISH FUNGAL GROWTH SPREADING UNDER THE LEAVES. WITH THE MILD, WET WEATHER OF THAT 1845 SUMMER, IT SPREAD VERY QUICKLY.

"WE STOP THE PRESS WITH VERY GREAT REGRET TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE POTATO MURRAIN HAS UNEquivocALLY DECLARED ITSELF IN IRELAND. THE CROPS ABOUT DUBLIN ARE SUDDENLY PERISHING . . . WHERE WILL IRELAND BE IN THE EVENT OF A UNIVERSAL POTATO ROT?" (DR. LINDLEY, EDITOR, GARDENERS' CHRONICLE, 13TH SEPT. 1845)

DR. LINDLEY ASKED AN IMPORTANT QUESTION AND HE WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE - INDEED, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO A COUNTRY WHOSE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE SUBISTED ON THAT ONE CROP? NO ONE COULD STOP THE FIRE-LIKE SPREAD OF THE BLIGHT AND IT
RESULTED IN A 60% LOSS. BY 1846, PLANTINGS HAD BEEN REDUCED AND BY THE MONTH OF AUGUST, THE WHOLE CROP TOTALLY DESTROYED. (KEATING, FAMINE FACTS, P.31)

PEOPLE HAD BEGUN TO STARVE, THEY WERE NOW EATING ANYTHING WHICH COULD BE DEVORED, FOOD THAT STANK, NETTLES THAT STUNG AND EVEN DISEASED POTATOES WHICH CAUSED GREAT SICKNESS. WITH THE TOTAL FAILURE OF THE CROP THAT YEAR, ALL HOPE DISAPPEARED. NOW, WINTER SET IN, NOT A NORMAL IRISH WINTER, BUT THE HARSHEST AND LONGEST IN LIVING MEMORY. THERE WAS NO FOOD LEFT. ALL CLOTHING AND BITS OF FURNITURE HAD BEEN SOLD AND A TERRIBLE FEAR SEIZED THE FAMISHED PEOPLE. TO MAKE THINGS EVEN WORST A FEVER EPIDEMIC SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

ROBERT PEEL, WHO WAS PRIME MINISTER AT THE TIME ORDERED ALL SORTS OF REPORTS ON THE BLIGHT AND DID WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS HIS BEST TO HELP. HIS IMPORTING CORN INTO IRELAND THE FIRST YEAR OF THE FAMINE, PROBABLY KEPT MANY FROM TOTAL DESTITUTION, BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO HELP HIS CLOSEST NEIGHBOUR. THE PROBLEM WAS THAT ENGLAND DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE IRISH CULTURE, AND POOR LAW RULES WHICH WORKED WELL IN ENGLAND, WERE JUST NOT SUCCESSFUL IN IRELAND.

AS THE GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FEEDING THE MASSES OF STARVING DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE TROUBLE, SOUP KITCHENS WERE OPENED AND RUN WILLINGLY, BY THE QUAKERS. THEY SET UP A NETWORK OF ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP THROUGHOUT IRELAND AND BY 1849, WHEN THEY CLOSED DOWN, THEY HAD RAISED $200,000, HALF OF WHICH HAD BEEN CONTRIBUTED BY UNITED STATES CITIZENS.

FINALLY, IN THE THIRD YEAR, THE GOVERNMENT STARTED TO OPERATE SOUP KITCHENS ON A MASSIVE SCALE.
AS THE HUNGER CONTINUED AND THE WHOLE SITUATION BECAME WORSE, TENANTS WHO NORMALLY PAID THEIR RENT, NOW COULD NOT DO SO. THE LANDLORDS, EAGER TO CLEAR THEIR PROPERTY OF NON-PAYING TENANTS, EVICTED THEM. LARGE DETACHMENTS OF TROOPS WERE CALLED IN TO HELP EVICT THE FAMILIES.

THIS IS BRIDGET O’DONNELL, WHO HAD LIVED NEAR KILRUSH, A LITTLE SEAPORT TOWN ON THE SHANNON (FROM A REPORT IN THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, DEC. 1849):

“IN DEC. 1847, SHE WAS DESTITUTE, AND THE LANDLORD WANTED THE LAND AND TO BE RID OF HIS WRETCHED TENANTS. HER HUSBAND USED TO HAVE FOUR AND A HALF ACRES OF LAND AND THREE ACRES OF BOG. THEY HAD BEEN PUT OUT BECAUSE THEY OWED RENT, AND THEIR CROP OF OATS HAD BEEN TAKEN. SHE WAS ABOUT TO HAVE ANOTHER BABY AND HAD GONE BACK TO THE COTTAGE. THIS THEN HAPPENED, "DAN SHEEDEY AND GIVE OR TAKE SIX MEN CAME TO TUMBLE MY HOUSE, THEY WANTED ME TO GIVE POSSESSION. I SAID THAT I WOULD NOT; I HAD FEVER AND WAS WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF MY LYING DOWN [LABOUR]; THEY COMMENCED KNOCKING DOWN THE HOUSE, AND HAD HALF OF IT KNOCKED DOWN WHEN TWO NEIGHBOURS, TWO WOMEN, CARRIED ME OUT. I HAD THE PRIEST [LAST RITES] AND A DOCTOR TO ATTEND ME SHORTLY AFTER.. I WAS CARRIED INTO A CABIN, AND LAY THERE FOR EIGHT DAYS, WHEN I HAD THE CREATURE BORN DEAD. I LAY FOR THREE WEEKS AFTER THAT. THE WHOLE OF MY FAMILY GOT THE FEVER AND ONE BOY OF 13 YEARS, DIED WITH WANT AND HUNGER WHILE WE WERE LYING SICK. DAN SHEEDEY AND BLAKE TOOK THE CORN INTO KILRUSH, AND SOLD IT. I DON’T KNOW WHAT THEY GOT FOR IT. I HAD NOT A BITE FOR MY CHILDREN TO EAT WHEN THEY TOOK IT FROM ME.”

THIS TELLS THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THOUSANDS.
POOR WRETCHES WOULD SEEK REFUGE IN WHAT WAS CALLED A "SCALPEEN". A HOLE WAS DUG IN THE EARTH TWO OR THREE FEET DEEP, ROOFED OVER WITH STICKS AND PIECES OF TURF AND IN THIS BURROW, A FAMILY EXISTED.

IN TIME, OF COURSE, THESE "SCALPEENS" WERE DISCOVERED BY THE LANDLORDS, AND TORN DOWN. THE EVICTED AND THEIR FAMILIES THEN WERE PUT OUT ON THE ROAD TO SURVIVE AS BEST THEY COULD.

BETWEEN HUNGER AND DISEASES THE NUMBER OF DEATHS WAS SO LARGE THAT COFFINS COULD NOT BE FOUND, MANY WERE TIED UP IN STRAW AND PUT IN THE GRAVE. THE DAYS OF GRAND FUNERALS AND IRISH WAKES WERE OVER, INDEED PEOPLE WORRIED WHO WOULD BE LEFT ALIVE TO BURY THEM.

THE FOOD DEPOTS WERE FILLED WITH CORN BUT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT RELEASE IT UNTIL ALL THE FOOD IN THE SHOPS HAD BEEN SOLD. BUT WHERE DID THEY EXPECT THE HUNGRY TO FIND THE MONEY TO BUY IT? AT THIS STAGE, EVEN WITH MASSES OF PEOPLE DYING IN DITCHES, THE ENGLISH REFUSED TO RECOGNIZED THE SCOPE OF THE DISASTER. FINALLY, IN MANY PLACES, PEOPLE WHO STILL HAD THE STRENGTH, TOOK MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS, ATTACKED THE DEPOTS AND TOOK THE GRAIN.

IN 1847, THE GOVERNMENT MADE THE DECISION NOT TO SUPPLY FOOD IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER CROP FAILURE IN IRELAND. THEY PASSED THE BURDEN OF MAINTAINING THE POORHOUSES ONTO THE SHOULDERS OF THE LANDLORDS. THE FACT WAS, THAT EVEN IF THE LANDLORDS HAD PAID THEIR ASSESSED SHARE OF OPERATION THESE POORHOUSES, IT STILL WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ENOUGH TO COVER THE COST OF FEEDING THE HUGE NUMBER OF THOSE IN NEED OF BASIC HELP. WHILE THE LANDLORDS WERE NOT ENTIRELY BLAMELESS DURING THIS TERRIBLE TIME, THE MAIN FAULT LIES WITH A GOVERNMENT WHICH DID NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR A PEOPLE THAT IT HAD REDUCED TO POVERTY AND STARVATION.
INDEED, IT WOULD SEEM THAT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND LANDLORDS THERE WAS A PRIVATE BATTLE GOING ON AND THE STARVING IRISH PEASANTS WERE ABSOLUTELY INCONSEQUENTIAL. WHETHER IT INVOLVED EVICTIONS OR THE UPKEEP OF WORKHOUSES, THE GOVERNMENT BLAMED LANDLORDS AND THEY, IN RETURN BELIEVED THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY BELONGED TO THE ENGLISH GOVERNMENT.

IN 1838, UNDER THE POOR LAW ACT 130 WORKHOUSES WERE OPENED ALL OVER IRELAND. THESE WERE BUILT TO SHELTER AND FEED THE DESTITUTE, OLD AND INSANE. HOWEVER, FEW PEOPLE EVER RESIDED IN THEM AS CONDITIONS THERE WERE SO HARSH AND THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS WHO RAN THEM SHOWED LITTLE KINDNESS TO ANYONE UNDER THEIR CARE. EVEN IN 1846 THERE WERE LESS THAT 45,000 PEOPLE LIVING THEM. NOW, AS THE POTATO CROP FAILED A SECOND YEAR AND THE NUMBER OF DISTRESSED PEOPLE GREW LARGER, THESE DREADED WORKHOUSES FILLED TO OVERFLOWING. "BY THE YEAR 1848, THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 130,000 INMATES - 1849, 190,000 AND A PEAK OF 217,000 IN 1851."

IN DUNFANAGHY, CO. DONEGAL, THE WORKHOUSE GRIM AND TOWERING ABOVE THE WILD AND CHILLING OCEAN, TOOK PRIDE IN BEING BETTER THAN MANY OTHERS. THIS WAS MAINLY BECAUSE OF THE INTEREST GOOD LANDLORDS AND CLERGY TOOK. THEY TOOK AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN THIS WORKHOUSE. FOR EXAMPLE A REPORT SHOWED:

WE FOUND THE POORHOUSE IN EXCELLENT ORDER AND THE INMATES APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH. THE DIET WAS 17 OZ. OF OAT AND INDIAN MEAL HALF AND HALF WITH THREE-QUARTERS A QUART OF BUTTERMILK DAILY FOR THE ABLE-BODIED, VARIED WITH RICE TWICE A WEEKLY.

HOWEVER, A REPORT OF THE WORKHOUSE IN GLENTIES, THE NEXT TOWNLAND OVER READ:

WE VISITED THE POOR HOUSE AT GLENTIES, WHICH IS IN A DREADFUL STATE; THE PEOPLE WERE, IN FACT, HALF-
STARVED AND HALF-CLOTHED. THE DAY BEFORE, THEY HAD ONE MEAL OF OATMEAL AND WATER, AND AT THE TIME OF OUR VISIT HAD NOT SUFFICIENT FOOD IN THE HOUSE FOR THE DAY'S SUPPLY . . . THEIR BEDDING CONSISTED OF DIRTY STRAW, IN WHICH THEY WERE LAID IN THE ROWS ON THE FLOOR; AND WE DID NOT SEE A BLANKET AT ALL. THE ROOMS ARE HARDLY BEARABLE FOR FILTH. THE LIVING AND DYING WERE STRETCHED SIDE BY SIDE BENEATH THE SAME MISERABLE COVERING.

(SHOW POSTERS OF FAMINE EXIBITS FROM WORKHOUSE, DUNFANAGHY)

DYING WAS ONE WAY OUT OF THE TERRIBLE NIGHTMARE BUT SOME TIME, THERE HAD BEEN ANOTHER: EMIRATION, PEOPLE WERE LEAVING FROM EVERY PORT IN IRELAND, IN 1847 ALONE, SOME QUARTER OF A MILLION IRISH MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEFT THEIR HOMELAND.

75. AT FIRST, YOUNG, SINGLE PEOPLE LEFT, BUT AS THE FAMINE CONTINUED, WHOLE FAMILIES YOUNG AND OLD, SOLD WHATEVER THEY HAD LEFT, TO PAY THE FARE TO CANADA OR AMERICA. MANY OF THE POOREST NEVER GOT BEYOND THE ENGLISH PORT FROM WHICH THEY HOPED TO SAIL. BY MID-MAY 1847, THERE WERE OVER 100,000 IRISH, BEGGING AND DESTITUTE, WANDERING AROUND THE STREETS OF LIVERPOOL AND OTHER NORTHERN ENGLISH TOWNS.

79. IN IRELAND ALSO, GREAT THONGS MOVED ALONG THE ROADS, MAKING THEIR WAY TO THE DOCKS IN BELFAST, DUBLIN, GALWAY OR CORK. HUNDREADS DIED ON THE WAY, AND WERE FOUND WITH GREEN AROUND THEIR MOUTHS, WHERE THEY HAD EATEN GRASS TO TRY AND KEEP LIFE IN THEIR STARVING BODIES.

81. JAMES MAHONY, A FAMOUS ARTIST FROM CORK, WAS SENT TO DESCRIBE IN SKETCHES WHAT HE WITNESSED:

"I STARTED FROM CORK, BY THE MAIL, FOR SKIBBEREEN AND SAW LITTLE UNTIL WE CAME TO CLONAKILTY, WHERE THE COACH STOPPED FOR BREAKFAST; AND HERE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE HORRORS OF THE
POVERTY BECAME VISIBLE, IN THE VAST NUMBER OF FAMISHED POOR, WHO FLOCKED AROUND THE COACH TO BEG ALMS; AMONGST THEM WAS A WOMAN CARRYING IN HER ARMS THE CORPSE OF A FINE CHILD, AND MAKING THE MOST DISTRESSING APPEAL TO THE PASSENGERS FOR AID TO ENABLE HER TO PURCHASE A COFFIN AND BURY HER DEAR LITTLE BABY ... (ILN, FEB. 1847)

IN THEIR DESPERATION TO FLEE IRELAND, THERE WAS LITTLE THOUGHT TO THE DREADFUL HARDSHIPS THEY WOULD HAVE TO ENDURE ON THE LONG VOYAGE TO CANADA OR AMERICA. THE ONLY THING ON THEIR MINDS NOW, WAS TO ESCAPE, TO FLEE THEIR BELOVED IRELAND, WHICH HAD BECOME A LAND OF STARVATION, DEATH AND SORROW.

CARTOON FROM THE 1880s.

"WAITING FOR THE TRAIN" PAINTING BY ERSKINE NICHOLS CONVEYS MORE THAN WORDS COULD SAY. "WEEP SORRE FOR HIM THAT GOETH AWAY, FOR HE SHALL RETURN NO MORE TO SEE HIS NATIVE COUNTRY". THIS IS A QUOTATION FROM THE CORINTHIANS AND THE SADNESS SEEMS TO BE IN THE EYES OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, LEAVING THEIR HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE MAJORITY OF EMIGRANTS LEFT FROM LIVERPOOL BECAUSE OF THE CHEAPER FARE. THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION REQUIRED FOR SAILING, IN THESE EARLY DAYS, WAS A FARCE. AS MANY AS 3,000 WERE EXAMINED BY SOMETIMES ONLY THREE DOCTORS, IN ONE DAY. IF A PERSON COULD STAND UP, HE WAS CONSIDERED FIT.

AS THEY WAITED AT THE DOCKS FEW REALIZED WHAT WAS AHEAD OF THEM ON BOARD THESE "COFFIN SHIPS", AS LATER EMIGRANTS CALLED THEM.

BOARDING THE PACKET SHIP WAS NOT AS SIMPLE AS WALKING UP A GANGPLANK. MEN, WOMEN AND LITTLE CHILDREN HAD TO SCRAMBLE UP THE SIDES OF THE SHIP. FREQUENTLY, THEY FELL INTO THE WATER. THIS HAPPENED BECAUSE THE CAPTAIN WOULD NOT PERMIT
STEERAGE PASSENGERS TO GO ABOARD UNTIL THE CARGO WAS STOWED IN THE HOLE. APPARENTLY, THE CARGO WAS IMPORTANT, THE LIVES OF THE EMIGRANTS, WORTH NOTHING.

MANY OF THE SHIPS WERE OWNED BY UNSCRUPULOUS MEN WHO TOOK GREAT ADVANTAGE OF THE BAD SITUATION TO MAKE A PROFIT. OFTEN, FIVE OR SIX HUNDRED PEOPLE WERE SQUEEZED INTO SPACES ORIGINALLY INTENDED FOR ANIMALS AND GRAIN. QUITE OFTEN, A SHIP SANK AFTER ONLY A SHORT TIME AT SEA.

THE OCEAN MONARCH, 1,300 TONS, BURNED IN THE MERSEY, IN AUGUST 1848, WITH THE LOSS OF 176 LIVES.

A CARTOON OF THE 1800's, SHOWS JUST HOW MUCH VALUE WAS PLACED ON AN EMIGRANT'S LIFE, "MAN IN THE WATER, HELP! OR I'LL PERISH." ONE OF THE CREW SHOUTS, "ROW ON, JEM, NEVER MIND HIM, HE'S ONLY A PASSENGER."

ONCE ON BOARD, THE PASSENGERS HAD TO CROWD ON THE DECK TO LISTEN TO A ROLL CALL, IF ANY STOWAWAYS WERE FOUND, THEY WERE IN GRAVE TROUBLE. ONE OF THE MATES AND SOME CREW WOULD GO BELOW WITH LANTERNS AND LONG POLES TO POKE AROUND THE DARK CORNERS OF THE HOLD TO SEARCH FOR THE POOR CREATURES THAT WOULD BE HIDING. IF FOUND, THEY WERE OFTEN TARRED AND FEATHERED AND MADE TO WORK. STEERAGE PASSENGERS SUFFERED FROM NOT ONLY TERRIBLE CONDITIONS, BUT ALSO OF CRUEL TREATMENT DOLED OUT BY A ROUGH CREW. IT WAS COMMON FOR FRIGHTENED, WEAK EMIGRANTS TO BE BRUTALLY BEATEN OR HAVE THEIR FOOD AND WATER RATIONS CUT.

A REPORTER FROM THE LONDON TIMES WROTE THAT "THE BLACK HOLE OF CALCUTTA" WAS A BLESSING, COMPARED WITH WHAT THE POOR IRISH EMIGRANT HAD TO DEAL WITH.

AS ALWAYS, THEY MADE THE BEST OF WHAT THEY HAD. THIS FAMOUS SKETCH SHOWS "DANCING BETWEEN THE
DECKS”. PROBABLY IT WAS A SCENE RECORDED VERY EARLY IN THE VOYAGE.

110. AFTER THE LONG OCEAN VOYAGE, THOSE WHO SURVIVED, ARRIVED WEAK, ILL AND QUITE UNPREPARED FOR WHAT MET THEM IN NEW YORK. THERE WAS NO ELLIS ISLAND OR EVEN CASTLE GARDENS TO WELCOME THEM, IN THIS EARLY PERIOD. SHIPS DOCKED IN SOUTH STREET, NAMED “THE STREET OF SHIPS”, OR IN WATER STREET, CLOSE BY. MANY WERE SO FRIGHTENED AND CONFUSED WITH ALL THE EXCITEMENT THAT THEY STAYED FOR YEARS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOODS AROUND THE DOCKS. AL SMITH’S GRANDPARENTS, THE MULVEHILLS, WHO CAME IN 1841, SETTLED IN WATER STREET, JUST A FEW BLOCKS FROM WHERE THEY LANDED. HERE THEY PRODUCED A GRANDSON WHO RAN AS A CANDIDATE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION IN 1928. THE MULVEHILLS DID THE TYPICAL THING FOR THOSE WHO HAD LITTLE MONEY TO TRAVEL ANY FURTHER.

111. THIS IS A PANORAMIC VIEW OF NEW YORK IN THE 1800’s. THE CIRCULAR BUILDING IS CASTLE GARDENS, WHICH BY 1856, WAS BEING USED AS AN IMMIGRANT DEPOT AND WAS A FORERUNNER OF ELLIS ISLAND.

114. SOME OF THE NEWLY ARRIVED WERE FORTUNATE TO HAVE A RELATIVE OR FRIEND MEET THEM, EMPLOYMENT WAS ARRANGED AND DECENT LODGINGS FOUND IN THE IRISH WARDS. THOSE WHO ARRIVED ALONE, WITHOUT HELP, FACED THE “RUNNERS” WHO COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED THEM.

116. THESE BULLIES WORKED IN GANGS AND LIVED OFF THE FRIGHT AND CONFUSION OF THE NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS. RUNNERS STOLE AND ROBBED, THEY BULLIED AND FORCED POOR, MUDDLED PEOPLE TO HAND OVER THEIR BITS OF LUGGAGE AND THEY OFTEN SOLD RIVER, CANAL OR RIVERBOAT TICKETS, WHICH WERE BOGUS.
I WILL END WITH SLIDES OF THE DOCK AREAS AND THIS VERY SPECIAL EARLY PHOTOGRAPH OF WATER STREET. THE IRISH OF THESE GREAT FAMINE YEARS LEFT A LAND OF UTTER DESOLATION AND FEW WERE DESTINED TO ACHIEVE PROSPERITY IN THE NEW WORLD FOR MANY YEARS TO COME. THE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH DOMINATION AND NOW THE YEARS OF FAMINE WOULD LEAVE THEIR MARK. IT WAS THE FATE OF THE FAMINE IRISH TO BE REGARDED WITH AVERSION AND CONTEMPT BY YET AGAIN, THE ENGLISH, BUT THIS TIME IN THE FORM OF YANKEE DOMINATION.

THANK YOU.
SLIDE PRESENTATION

SLIDE 1  Map of Ireland in 1848, John Percival, The Great Famine, (Introduction).


SLIDE 3  Photograph of Tenant Cottages, Teelin, Co. Donegal, Kirby Miller & Paul Wagner, Out of Ireland, p. 19.

SLIDE 4  Photograph at Gap of Dunloe, Killarney (Lawrence Collection, NLI), Theodora Fitzgibbon, A Taste of Ireland.

SLIDE 5  Photograph from (Glass Collection, Gweedore) Brian Mercer Walker, Shadows on Glass.

SLIDE 6  Ibid.

SLIDE 7  Ibid.

SLIDE 8  Photograph of Gentlemen in the Mountains, Co. Kerry, Edward Morrison Period Photographs, Fitzgibbon, A Taste of Ireland.

SLIDE 9  Photograph of The Gentry, in Glendalough, Ibid.

SLIDE 10 Photograph of The Mail Coach, Eyre Sq., Galway, (Lawrence Collection), Ireland from Old Photographs.

SLIDE 11 Photograph showing overpopulation in Gweedore (Lawrence Collection), Miller & Wagner, Out of Ireland.

SLIDE 12 Photograph Gweedore Family, (Glass Coll.) Shadows on Glass.

SLIDE 13 Photograph Donegal family, Ibid.

SLIDE 14 Cottages in Co. Donegal, (Glass Collection) Shadows On Glass.

SLIDE 15 Ibid.


SLIDE 18  Photograph of Barefooted Colleen, (Ulster Folk Museum Collection).

SLIDE 19  Photograph of Farmer in Kilkeel, Co. Down, Winnowing, (Green Collection, Ulster Folk Mus.).

SLIDE 20  Photograph "An Ould Couple", (Soodlums Irish Ballad Book).

SLIDE 21  Photo. "Mother & Son, Co. Clare", (Lawrence Collection, NLI), Miller, Wagner *Out of Ireland.*


SLIDE 23  Photo. of woman and child at the hearth, Ibid.

SLIDE 24  Photo. of kitchen of 'strong farmer', Ibid.


SLIDE 27  Sketch of Belfast from the Lagan, 1864, (UFM).


SLIDE 29  Photo. of street outside Belfast City, (Welsh Collection).

SLIDE 30  Photo. of Raphael St. Belfast (Welsh Collection), Brian Mercer Walker, *Faces of the Past.*

SLIDE 31  Photo. of Women With Baskets, (Green Collection, UFM).

SLIDE 32  Photo. of Women in Newcastle, Co. Down, Ibid.

SLIDE 33  Very early photo. of The Stone-Breakers, Co. Tipperary, Peter Gray...
The Irish Famine.

SLIDE 34  Photo. of Pepper Hill Steps, Carrickhill, Belfast, (Welsh Collection).
SLIDE 35  Sketch of Clifton St. “Poor House”, 1735 (Donaldson).
SLIDE 36  Sketch of a potato plant (ILN), Stephen Campbell, The Great Irish Famine.
SLIDE 37  Photo. of women setting seed potatoes at Glenshesk, Co. Antrim (Welsh Collection).
SLIDE 38  Painting “News of the Potato Failure” (National Gallery, Dublin) D. McDonald.
SLIDE 39  Sketch “News of the Potato Failure” (British Library), Robert Kee, Ireland: A History.
SLIDE 41  Sketch of people digging for potatoes (ILN).
SLIDE 42  Sketch of the “Potato Diggers” (ILN).
SLIDE 43  Photo. of Sir Robert Peel, (Hulton-Deutsch Collection), C. Kinealy, This Great Calamity.
SLIDE 44  Photo. from Famine Exhibit, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.
SLIDE 46  Sketch of cottage interior with people dying of fever and disease, (Ulster Museum), C. Kinealy, This Great Calamity.
SLIDE 47  Ibid.
SLIDE 48  Sketch of Soyer’s Soup Kitchen, (Ulster Museum), Ibid.
SLIDE 49  Sketch of Soup Kitchen, (ILN) Moody & Martin The Course of Irish History.
SLIDE 50  Sketch of Eviction, (ILN), Ibid.
SLIDE 51  Sketch of Eviction (ILN), Ibid.

SLIDE 52  Sketch of Eviction, (ILN 1848), Ibid.


SLIDE 54  Photo. of Co. Fermanagh Eviction, (Lawrence Collection, ILN).

SLIDE 55  Sketch of Bridget O'Donnell and her children (ILN).

SLIDE 56  Sketch of Captain Kennedy's daughter giving out clothes to the evicted, (ILN, Dec. 1849).

SLIDE 57  Sketch of evicted man within his sclapeen, (ILN, Dec. 1849).

SLIDE 58  Sketch of evicted man “Day After the Ejectment”, (ILN, Dec. 1848), C. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*.

SLIDE 59  Sketch of woman putting up a sclapeen, (ILN).

SLIDE 60  Sketch of Scalpin of Pat O'Conor, Kilrush, Co. Clare, (ILN), S. Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

SLIDE 61  Painting “On the Road”, (N.G.Dublin).

SLIDE 62  Sketch of Famine Funeral at Shepperton Lakes, (ILN)

SLIDE 63  Sketch of Funeral in Skibbereen, (H.Smith, NL, Dublin).

SLIDE 64  Sketch of Attack on Store of Potatoes, (ILN), C. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*.

SLIDE 65  Food Riots at Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, (Pictorial Times, Oct. 10th 1846).

SLIDE 66  Food Riots at depot for stored supplies, (ILN).

SLIDE 67  Engraving Food Supplies Under Military Escort, (Pictorial Times, Oct., 1847) P. Gray *The Irish Famine*.

SLIDE 68  Caricature Depicting Food Exports, (McLean's Monthly, No. 19).
SLIDE 69  Sketch of Live-stock been driven to sell for rent, Ouchterard and Galway, (ILN), S. Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine*.

SLIDE 70  Sketch of Clifden Workhouse, Co. Galway and Plan Designed to hold 400-800 people (Ulster Museum), C. Kinealy *This Great Calamity*.

SLIDE 71  Cartoon by W.A. Rogers, “Poor House from Galway”.

SLIDE 72  Cartoon “Union is Strength”, *Punch*, 17th Oct. 1846.


SLIDE 74  Photo. of Empty street in Youghal, Co. Waterford, (UFTM).

SLIDE 75  Sketch of Skull from Ballidichor (ILN), J. Killen, *The Famine Decade*.

SLIDE 76  Sketch of Family planning their leaving, (ILN).

SLIDE 77  Painting by Lady Butler, 1890, The Aftermath of famine, fevers and evictions, J. Percival *The Great Famine*.

SLIDE 78  Sketch of "Aftermath", (Mansell Collection), R. Kee, *Ireland, A History*.

SLIDE 79  Painting of Ford Family leaving for Detroit, by Rodney Charman, Laxton, *Famine Ships*.

SLIDE 80  Sketch “Leaving Home, The Priest's Blessing”, (ILN), Ibid.

SLIDE 81  Sketch by J. Mahony, Woman Begging at Clonakilty, (ILN, Feb. 1847).

SLIDE 82  Colored Painting by Rodney Charman, "Ford Family leaving for Detroit", Laxton, *Famine Ships*.

SLIDE 83  Painting “Letter from America” by James Brennan, 1875 (CMAG), P. Gray, *The Irish Famine*.

SLIDE 84  Sketch Ships leaving from Cork Harbour, (ILN).

SLIDE 85  Photo of Ships in Dublin Harbour, (Sean Sexton Collection) London.
Photo of Sailing Ships in Queen Quay, Belfast, (Robert French), Walker & Dixon, *No Mean City*.

Sketch of Waiting at the Docks (ILN).


Cartoon from the 1880's.

Painting "Waiting for the Train", by Erskine Nichol 1864, (Sheffield Art Museum), P. Gray *The Irish Famine*.

Sketch of Government Inspection Office (ILN).

Sketch of Emigrants waiting at the docks, (ILN).

Painting "Last Hour in the Old Land", by Margaret Allen, 1877, Gorry Gallery Dublin, P. Gray *The Irish Famine*.

Sketch “Coffin Ship”, (Hulton-Deutch Collection), J. Percival, *The Great Famine*.

Photo of Sailing Ships in Belfast. Ibid.


"Washington Irving", *Famine Ships*.

Sketch of Boarding the Ship, (Harper's Weekly), Ibid.

Painting "Boarding the Ship", P. Gray, *The Irish Famine*.

Sketch of "The Ocean Monarch", (ILN), Coleman, *Passage to America*.

Cartoon of 1800's, "Man in the Water" *Going to America*, Terry Coleman.

Painting “Below the Decks”, R. Charman, Laxton, *Famine Ships*.

Sketch of below the decks (ILN).

Sketch “The Black Hole of Calcutta” (ILN).
SLIDE 106 Painting “Odessa” Ships Cook for a Shilling, Laxton, Famine Ships.
SLIDE 107 Sketch "Dancing Below the Decks", (ILN), Coleman, Passage to America.
SLIDE 108 Sketch "Dancing in Steerage" (ILN), Ibid.
SLIDE 109 Sketch of Crowds Below (ILN), Ibid.
SLIDE 110 Photo. of South Street and Ships (City of NY Museum.).
SLIDE 111 Sketch of The Battery and Panorama of N.Y. (ILN), Coleman, Passage to America.
SLIDE 112 Photo. of South St. Quay. (City of NY Museum).
SLIDE 113 Painting “Erin go Bragh” sails into dock in America, R.Charman, Laxton, Famine Ships.
SLIDE 114 Painting, “South Street”, Ibid.
SLIDE 115 Sketch of Immigrants’ Arrival in N.Y.(ILN)
SLIDE 116 Painting by Erskine Nichols, 1871 “An Irish Emigrant landing at Liverpool”.
SLIDE 117 Sketch of Runners in N.Y. (ILN).
SLIDE 118 Photo. of Water Street, New York (City of NY Museum).
SLIDE PRESENTATION BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX I

Letters and diary excerpts are to be read in appropriate places during slide presentation.
Everybody was remarking to each other how dark the sky was. The old people all said they never saw such a coloured sky before. The wise or rather 'learned' people all said it was an eclipse of the sun. It was the topic of conversation with everybody. By night a thick blue fog had descended on the countryside and visibility was very poor.

The people went to bed in fear and dread that some great calamity was about to befall them. Next morning when they awoke and went out, to their consternation their lovely potato plants, which were in such bloom and showed such a promise of beautiful crops the day before, were all covered over with black spots and the leaves and stalks hanging down as if dead.

The potato blight had appeared for the first time in Ireland. The awful smell and stench of the blight was everywhere. (Famine Echoes, p. 35).
Daithi O'Ceanntabhail, national teacher, Croom, Co. Limerick

The deaths in my native place were many and horrible. The poor famine-stricken people were found by the wayside, emaciated corpses, partly green from eating docks and nettles and partly blue from the cholera and dysentery. (Poirteir, Cathal, Famine Echoes, p. 90).
William Keane, b.1891, a farmer, Ballingrenia, Moate, Co. Westmeath

The poorhouses were dreadful. People hated to have to go in; and outdoor relief and free meal were hated too. In cases where a homeless person was forced to go to the poorhouse, even in 1847-52, it is taxed to their relations up to the present day. 'The paupers' as the poor were called, were badly treated in the Workhouse. The food was poor and stingy. Those over them had no feeling for them. (Poirteir, Cathal, Famine Echoes, p. 126).
Maggie McKinley, b.1874, Craigmacagan, Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim

My grandmother minded the Famine. She said there was a boat come into the bay here that took away over a hundred people, whole families. She had five or six sisters and two brothers and they went away. A wild lot died on the boat going over.

From here they went to East Port, Maine, and a lot went to Boston. (Poirteir, Cathal, Famine Echoes, p. 245).
Seosamh O'Dochartaigh, b. 1894, a farmer, Ballagh Cnoc Glas, Malin, Inishowen, Co. Donegal

That was the time the “going away” started and they did leave in crowds. Most of the people from the Malin Head side, and indeed from all over Inishowen, went to Boston.

The ships that used to take them away were very bad and a whole lot of them died on the road and were thrown overboard. At that time the ships going to America used to call at Liverpool and when they did, the voyage was so bad that, that big crowds of the people got off and stayed there. That is why there are so many of our people in Liverpool. (Poirteir, Cathal, Famine Echoes, p. 246).