

1 New in New York

Jennifer: Hi, I'm Jennifer and I'm from Ireland. And I don't want to emigrate to the US. I'm just here for a visit. I want to see the country so many of my family came to. Most of them came because they couldn't find jobs in Ireland. They travelled to America to find work or start their own business. There had already been quite a few Irish immigrants, so there were people from their own homeland or even their own family here that helped them start their new lives.

I have just been to Ellis Island and checked on the computers. I found quite a few names the same as mine. I'm not sure if they were all my ancestors because a lot of people in Ireland have the same second name as me. Maybe some of the people I found on the computer aren't from my family, but just other O'Reillys.

Many Irish people emigrated in the 1840s when there was a big famine and millions of Irish people died because there was no food. The potato crop failed because the potatoes had a disease. You couldn't eat them, and potatoes were the main food of the Irish, especially the poorer ones. So, a lot of Irish people emigrated to America. I don't know if any of my ancestors came at that time, but perhaps they did.

I definitely know that my great-great-grandfather Patrick came to the US more than 130 years ago. He travelled from Belfast to Liverpool in England and then he boarded a ship to New York. I know he got here because I found his name on the computer on Ellis Island. It wasn't a nice trip to America.

Patrick didn't have much money, so he had to travel steerage. That means he had to sleep a long way down in the ship, below where the water comes to. It was very crowded, and the air was very bad.

The really sad thing about Patrick's journey was that he had to leave his family, his wife and four children, in Ireland. They didn't have enough money to pay for the whole family. The plan was for Patrick to send the money for the tickets when he had a job. That took a long time. When Patrick had the money to send home, his wife and three of his children had died. Only his youngest daughter, Kathleen, made the trip to the USA. They lived in the Bronx for ten years until Patrick died. Then Kathleen went to Chicago and she opened a clothes shop. It's still there and I went to Chicago to see it.