



## Honoring the Contributions of Immigrants to America

By Marilyn Madigan

June is Immigration Heritage Month. During this month, let us remember the generations of Irish immigrants who helped build and shape our nation. From our earliest days, Irish immigrants have contributed to the making of America. They served in the Revolution, printed the Declaration of Independence, designed and built the White House.

Irish women came to the shores of America prior to the founding of our Country. They came freely for a new life and also as indentured servants. These women helped to establish Irish communities in Colonial America. Irish born and Irish America women participated in the American Revolution.

One of those Irish women was Lydia Barrington Darragh. She was born in Dublin in 1728. The Darragh family settled in Philadelphia. Many left Philadelphia after the British took control of the city on Sept. 26, 1777. The Darraghs decided to stay in their home in Philadelphia thinking that as Quakers the British would not harass the family. Although Quakers were considered pacifists, the eldest Darragh son was serving in the Continental Army. The British requested the use of the Darragh home as a meeting place but the family was still residing in the home. During the meetings of the British Officers, the family members were ordered to their bedrooms and remain in their rooms. Lydia suspected that the Officers were planning their activities and fearing that her son and others in the Continental Army could be in danger. She hid in a closet of room next to the meeting room to listen to their plans. Hearing their plans of an ambush on the American troops, she obtained a pass to leave the city to purchase flour. During the trip to the mill to obtain the flour, she passed on the information of the plans of the ambush to be shared with the Army. The Army was prepared when the British arrived. Her activity as a spy helped the Continental Army. What a brave Irish woman.

Another example of Irish women Immigrants participation during the Revolution were the Gilmore Sisters. Elizabeth and Ann Gilmore emigrated from the North of Ireland as teenagers. The Gilmore Sisters were nurses at Valley Forge. General Horatio Gates the Continental Army informed Washington that "the sick suffered much for want of good female nurses." Washington advocated for more nurses and Congress approved one nurse per ten patients and one matron assigned to oversee the care of 100 soldiers. In addition to serving as a nurse Elizabeth along with her husband John Berry were privates in the Continental Army.

The largest waves of Irish immigration were during the period of An Gorta Mor from 1845-1850. During this period, Irish immigrant women came by themselves, traveled independently and became domestic workers, factory laborers, teachers, nurses, and religious sisters. Their labor and sacrifice helped countless immigrant families survive and thrive in America. One of the women who left New Ross, Wexford was Bridget Murphy. During the journey to America, she met her husband, Patrick Kennedy. Patrick and Bridget Murphy Kennedy are the great grandparents of President John F Kennedy. The Kennedys did not have an easy life in Boston. Patrick died leaving Bridget with young children. Bridget needed to make a life for herself and her young family. She became a successful woman operating a store. If it was not for Bridget Murphy Kennedy, the tenacious matriarch of the clan, would we have heard of the Kennedys? We all know the accomplishment of Bridget's male descendants but the women in the Kennedy family have also made remarkable achievements. Eunice Kennedy Shriver was the founder of the Special Olympics. Jean Kennedy Smith served as the United States Ambassador to Ireland and was involved in the Peace Process leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. Maria Shriver is an American journalist and author. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend served as the Lt. Governor of Maryland, and Caroline Kennedy served as the U.S. Ambassador of Japan and Australia.

During the American Civil War, Irish women immigrants made significant contributions from working in the Washington Arsenal to nursing on the battlefields. In 1864, 21 Irish women immigrants lost their lives in an explosion at the Washington Arsenal. President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton attended the procession and burial at the Congressional Cemetery. This was one of the first monuments to Women in the Nation's Capital. The names on the Monument can barely be read but the AOH and LAOH commissioned a grave marker with the names to be placed next to the Monument. The second Monument to Women in the Nation's Capital is the Nuns of the Battlefield recognizing the Sister Nurses from 12 Congregations. One of those was Sr. Anthony (Mary O'Connell) who was born in Limerick and emigrated to America after the death of her mother. She entered the Sisters of Charity in June 1835. In 1852, she was a founding member of the community in Cincinnati and involved in the beginning of St. John's Hospital. Sr. Anthony served during the Civil War at Camp Dennison and was known for pioneering battlefield triage. Sr. Anthony O'Connell is the image of "the Angel of the Battlefield." Another Immigrant woman was Margaret Gaffney Haughery born in County Leitrim. She arrived in Baltimore at the age of five. After the deaths of her parents due to the yellow fever epidemic, a neighbor took her in and Margaret was expected to work as a domestic servant. In 1835, she married Charles Haughery moving to New Orleans. Early in her married life, she lost both her husband and daughter leaving Margaret alone again. The Sisters of Charity provided Margaret a place to live and help with her finding a job. In her free time, she helped with the orphans left in the Sisters care and donated part of her salary to support the children. She helped to establish St. Teresa's Orphan Asylum. Margaret became an entrepreneur purchasing a Bakery. During the Civil War, she distributed food and also provide nursing services to the people of New Orleans along with her work with the orphans. She was a local hero and a pillar of the community building orphanages always making sure that her donations helped children in need regardless of race, religion or social class.

Irish immigrant women were instrumental in building of their communities. They were involved in their parish life and organizations preserving their faith, family traditions, and Irish culture. Many worked in the Mills, factories, and in domestic service under difficult conditions and

became advocates for labor reform and workers' rights. The most famous was Mary Harris Jones "Mother Jones" a self-proclaimed "hell-raiser" in the cause of economic justice and dignity for working families. Mother Jones was considered "the most dangerous woman in America." Mary Harris was born in County Cork. Her family emigrated during an Gorta Mor. Mary Harris Jones lost her entire family during the yellow fever epidemic in 1867 and in the Chicago Fire of 1871 lost everything she owned. From 1871 she immersed herself in righting the wrongs faced by American miners and campaigning for the abolition of child labor under her mantra, "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living."

During Immigration Month in June, we honor our Flag and also commemorate the end of slavery. Our flag represents the unity of the states, the sacrifices made to preserve liberty, and the enduring ideals of democracy and freedom. On Juneteeth, all Americans are reminded that the pursuit of liberty and equal justice continues for all people.

The Statue of Liberty a gift from France is a powerful symbol of America. The Statue of Liberty, standing proudly in New York Harbor, symbolizes hope, opportunity, and welcome to generations of immigrants who came seeking freedom and a better life. On Ellis Island in the shadow of Lady Liberty, Annie Moore from Ireland was welcomed to our shores. Millions have followed her arriving in America seeking freedom, opportunity, and a better life for their families.

The Flag and the Statue of Liberty are two powerful symbols of our Country. Together, the American flag and the Statue of Liberty express the spirit and promise of America. The flag symbolizes the nation and the sacrifices made to defend freedom, while Lady Liberty represents hope, human dignity, and opportunity for all.

During this Immigration Heritage Month, let us remember that our country has benefitted by the diverse cultures and traditions, courage and sacrifices of immigrant families. For Irish Americans, Immigrant Heritage Month carries special significance. Irish immigrants came to America seeking freedom from famine, poverty, and political oppression. Through faith, determination, and hard work, they helped build railroads, cities, churches, schools, and communities while serving honorably in the armed forces and public service.

During Immigrant Heritage Month, the American flag and the Statue of Liberty stand together as symbols of freedom, hope, unity, and the enduring promise of America. Let us continue to welcome and share the promise of America to those who want to share in the American dream. Let the words of the New Colossus by Emma Lazarus continue to welcome new immigrants "Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, With conquering limbs astride from land to land; Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame. "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

All Americans at one time were immigrants. Happy Immigrations Heritage Month