

Family History Survey

Directions

What do you know about your own family history? Sit down with your family and answer the questions below as best as you can. Feel free to include any extra information that you find interesting or personally meaningful about your family history.

1. What nationalities or ethnicities does your family claim as their origin?
2. Do you consider yourself an immigrant?
3. Were any of your ancestors immigrants? If so, when and where did they come from, and where did they settle?
4. Mark on the map below your family's original home country or countries.
5. How long has your family lived in your current state?
6. Does your family maintain any traditions or customs from your country or countries of origin? If so, what? Do they help shape your family gatherings?



Background Essay: A Nation of Immigrants – A History of Immigration to 1924

The United States has, since its founding, been a destination for immigrants. Immigrants are people who cross international borders to take up permanent residence. As a nation of the people, by the people, and for the people, America has always drawn people seeking freedom and self-government. Millions have flocked to her shores. They came to America because the United States represented hope, a chance at making a life for themselves that was not possible in most of the rest of the world. Some came to find greater economic opportunity, some for religious freedom, some to be freed from oppressive regimes, others for relief from famine or other economic hardships. However, they all chose the United States over every other country in the world, because the United States offered freedom and opportunity that precious few other nations did. Their experiences may have varied widely, but they all had hope in America because they had real opportunity to make something of themselves by their own will and effort.

The first large influx of modern peoples to what is now the United States were the British migrants who came as colonists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These initial settlements along the East Coast grew steadily, shaped primarily by British customs and laws. Some colonists arrived as part of proprietary expeditions, recruited by those who owned an interest in the colonies. For example, investors in the Virginia Company of London recruited and outfitted groups of settlers bound for the new world. Others, as in the Plymouth colony, sailed to

the new world together as a religious community, seeking the relative freedom a new settlement would represent. Still other early settlers were too poor to pay for the passage themselves and arrived in North America as indentured servants who bought passage with three to seven years of contracted labor.

By the end of the 1700s, the United States had declared itself independent and fought a revolution to establish itself as a constitutional republic. It was now a sovereign nation with its own distinct political principles, and began to develop its own institutions, customs, and traditions. With the Naturalization Act of 1790, Congress enacted the first specific laws governing immigration and citizenship in the United States.

Another significant source of early migration into North America in the 1600 and 1700s was the African slave trade. Approximately 500,000 persons were forcefully transported to British North America and the United States by 1810. By the end of the colonial period, nearly one out of every five inhabitants was of African descent. Slavery would come to have an immense impact on the political and cultural course of the nation. It created a crisis in the American conscience. How could a nation, born on the premise that all men are created equal, tolerate such an inherently unequal institution? This dilemma directed the course of American politics in the ensuing decades and it would take a long and bloody civil war to resolve it.

In the 1840s, the first significant wave of immigrants came to the United States from

Ireland. Ireland had experienced a massive increase in population but had only a small industrial sector with few job opportunities to accommodate the increase. The majority of this impoverished population lived in rural areas and engaged in farming the region's staple crop, potatoes. In the mid-1840s, a blight struck Ireland which devastated the potato crop, causing famine. Starvation quickly swept the country and with it disease and widespread death. The rural population were left with few options but to leave their farms. As a result, between 1845 and 1852, over one million desperate Irish migrants crammed into crowded ships with hopes for a fresh start in the United States.

The potato famine is an example of a push factor in immigration. A push factor is an occurrence that drives people from their homes to a foreign shore. The opposite of a push factor is a pull factor. A pull factor is an opportunity or occurrence that pulls or encourages a population to leave one nation for another. These factors can work in tandem with each other. One circumstance may motivate a people to look abroad for better opportunities, another draws them to a particular foreign shore. The Irish were pushed by the blight, and pulled by the political liberty and the promise of equal opportunity in the United States.

Another wave of immigrants was comprised of Germans who suffered a bleak economic outlook in Germany due to a surplus of labor that pushed them to look abroad for better opportunities for themselves and their families. Economic difficulties were compounded by the political and social change occurring in Europe throughout the 1800s. Germans were also pulled to the United States, with its promise of political and economic freedom. They had grown up in

the Europe of kings and empires, and sought a chance to make a life for themselves in a more democratic government. Over 3 million Germans came to the United States during the period from 1820 to 1880. They settled across the United States, taking advantage of cheap land and a growing economy.

Taking advantage of this opportunity was not easy for any of these immigrant groups. The Germans were the first significant group of people to immigrate to the United States who did not speak English as their first language and therefore had significant hurdles to overcome to adapt and thrive in America. Land was available for immigrants to homestead and farm but required clearing the land, tilling the fields, and harvesting crops, all by hand. Settling in cities came with its own difficulties. Immigrants struggled to carve out a market for their own business or toiled away for next to nothing for an employer, all while facing opposition as outsiders.

Another group of Europeans pulled to the United States in the latter half of the 1800s were from the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. These immigrants were tempted by the social mobility and religious freedom found in the United States as well as the abundance of available farmland. Like many immigrant groups, Scandinavian families tended to group together into communities of their own in the upper Midwest.

Technology, economic conditions, and social pressures around the world continued to grow, shift, and change with the century. Starting in the 1890s, a surge of immigration, identified by historians as the "new wave," began to arrive in the United States. Advances in steamship transportation and the changing economic and political situations in Europe meant increasing

numbers of immigrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe instead of northwest Europe as they had in previous decades. This difference in origin, language, and ethnicity meant they stood out more than the previous generation of immigrants. Industrial economic growth in the United States and the strong pull of freedom encouraged these immigrants to try their luck in the new world.

One of the largest of these groups were Italian immigrants. Italy was a country of divided kingdoms and geography. Northern and central Italy had advanced economically at a fairly rapid rate. The southern part of the country, however, lagged behind. This meant young southern Italians had limited means and opportunities to make a living. The majority of Italian immigrants settled in urban centers along the east coast, taking industrial jobs.

Another immigrant group entering the country during the period from 1880 to 1924 were eastern Europeans. Predominately from Austria-Hungary, Poland, and Russia, they shared a common geography, but their experiences of immigrating differed widely. Many of these immigrants were Jewish and driven out of their home countries due to increasing religious persecution. The majority entered the United States through the famous port of entry, Ellis Island, and settled in communal groups in the lower east side of New York.

By the late 1800s, the United States government had set up efficient systems for processing and evaluating immigrants as they arrived in the United States. Ellis Island, which opened in 1892, was a part of this system. After surviving the long and arduous journey to the United States, they were ferried off the ship that had brought them, put through a physical examination and had their papers checked.

They went through a brief questioning (though many did not speak English), collected their baggage, and if they passed all of these steps, they could enter America proper. They brought their traditional skills, foods, and customs, all of which added to the rich social fabric of the United States. However, many native-born Americans were concerned about their different languages, religions, and philosophies of government, causing tensions with the newcomers.

Americans at the time rightly believed that for a republic based on consent to survive, a population must value certain fundamental republican principles. The ideas of a constitutionally limited government, the rule of law, private property, individual liberty, only exist to the extent they are understood and guarded by a society. However, this desire to protect these fundamental principles wrongly became entangled with racial and religious prejudices of the time. Some feared that the health of the entire social contract was endangered because some of the immigrants arrived with differing notions of government, religion, and society. This led to harmful and immoral discrimination.

Many immigrants were discriminated against for their religious beliefs. The United States was primarily a Protestant nation. Many believed that Catholics were loyal to the Pope above the American government, which interfered with their patriotic allegiance to America. Starting with the increased number of Catholic immigrants from Ireland in the 1840s, tensions led to harsh treatment and unfair laws against the Irish and German Catholics, and later against Poles and other eastern Europeans.

One political group that was a particularly Anti-Catholic organization was the American

Party, which began in the 1840s. Also called the “Know-nothing” party, this nativist group was dedicated to halting what they believed was a corrupting influence on the American republican form of government by immigrants. They blamed the outsiders for taking jobs and opportunities away from native-born Americans whom they believed to be more deserving of the opportunities.

Another group of immigrants, the Chinese and Japanese, also suffered intolerance. Immigrants of Asian descent began arriving in the United States in the middle of the 1800s. It was not until after the end of the Civil War in 1865 that their numbers became significant. These immigrants were at first concentrated primarily in west coast cities and worked as laborers (especially on the railroad), farmers and merchants. They predominately moved into their own culturally distinct neighborhoods within these cities. Asian immigrants were exploited as cheap labor, feeding the insatiable need for workers in the ever expanding west. The Chinese Exclusionary Act of 1882, passed at the behest of organized labor, restricted Chinese immigration for ten years and prevented existing immigrants from enjoying the right to vote or becoming citizens. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt made a “gentlemen’s agreement” with Japan that he would prevent segregation of Japanese students in west coast schools if Japan would restrict Japanese immigration to America.

As the twentieth century dawned, nativists continued their efforts to legally exclude

immigrant groups. During World War I, nativists in the American Protective League attacked “hyphenated Americans.” German-Americans suffered discrimination and violence as all signs of German culture were excluded from public life. In addition, Congress passed a literacy test for immigrants (over President Woodrow Wilson’s veto) aimed at excluding the mostly illiterate “new immigrants” from southeastern Europe. In 1924, Congress passed the seminal Immigration Act of 1924, marking a major shift in immigration in the United States. It adjusted quotas, making them stricter, restricting the number of immigrants coming to America, particularly the new immigrants.

The United States is often referred to as a “Nation of Immigrants”. But in reality, the United States is a nation of Americans. Waves of immigrants who embraced the ideals of the nation as outlined in the Declaration of Independence, became Americans and helped to build the country and shape its institutions. Unified by a belief in these eternal principles, they helped settle the frontier and molded it into the fertile land it is today. They built cities, canals, and railroads, the infrastructure on which the nation still relies. Though many held on to their own cultural identities, they largely adopted American republican principles. Though their experience would be different after 1924, the millions hoping to settle in the United States and their importance to the nation, remained unchanged.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Who is an immigrant?
2. What was the first major ethnic group to immigrate to the United States?
3. What were three major factors drawing immigrants to the United States in the 1800s?
4. How did the pattern of immigration change throughout the 1800s?
5. What fears motivated the nativists' actions against immigrants?
6. What motivations do you believe caused immigrant families to group together upon relocating to the United States?

Graphic Organizer

Directions

As a group, use what you learned from the background essay to fill out the first three columns of the graphic organizer below. Try and write down as many examples for each category as you can. Then, use what you know about immigrants coming to the United States today to fill out the fourth column.

	Colonists 1600-1776	Old Wave Era 1840-1879	New Wave Era 1880-1924	Modern Era 1924-today
Motivation for moving				
Challenges faced				

Letter from Mary Garvey, Irish Immigrant, to Her Mother, October 24, 1850¹

Directions:

In October of 1850, Mary Garvey, a recent Irish immigrant, wrote a letter to her mother detailing her new life in the United States. Mary was typical of most Irish immigrants. She had left Ireland to escape poverty and start a better life in the new world. Read her letter below and answer the critical thinking questions. While you read, take note of what Mary highlights and what parts of her experience may be typical to all immigrants.

My Dear Mother,

I write these few lines to you hoping that you are now and will continue to be in good health when these shall reach you. How is Uncle and how are the children? Do they still continue to be in good health? And how is sister Margaret and brother Owen and Brother Thomas? Do they all still enjoy good health?

I was very sorry when I received your letter that Brother Owen thought hard of me because I did not ask about him. I did intend asking of him but made a mistake.

Dear Mother I fear that you think that I have forgotten you but this is no the case for I think of you every day of my life. [late and early] The cause of my not writing to you sooner was because we have had sickness in the family that I live in for a long time. I have left the place that I was at when I last wrote you and am now living in Hightstown about four miles from where I was before. I feel very uneasy about you all for fear that you may be sick or dead or that you may be suffering for the want of the comforts of

life. I am going to send home to you four pounds and I hope that you will not want for any more necessary things, for I will work and earn money enough while God speaks my life and strength that I have asked after him. I hope you won't forget to tell my Uncle for I love him as much as I could my own father and I hope you will give him some of the four pounds for I won't want to hear of him or any of his children suffering for anything more than I would myself. I should like to have very much my Uncles two daughters Mary and Bessy Elizabeth out here with me for I know that they could make a good living in this country. I want to know how little Patrick is? And how is John Kay and his family? Is his daughter Catherine a coming to this country? I hope that also Frank Conner and all his family are in good health and also Thomas and Catherine. I want you to tell me in the next letter how all these folks are that I have asked about and my other Uncle's little Mary and Patrick are? Are Peter Raffaerty and his family in good health?

¹Garvey, Mary. Letter from Mary Garvey, Irish immigrant, to her mother, October 24, 1850. Retrieved from Rutgers University Community Repository: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.7282/T3707ZXM>

I forgot to mention Rose and Owen Conner are they in good health Owen and all his family?

Dear Mother, I should like to know whether this has been a deer summer. I am afraid that it has been. I want to know also how my Uncle is getting along with his trade? Is he earning plenty of money to support his family if he is not I think he had better come over to this country for here he can make a good living and perhaps get rich. I like to be in this country very much great deal better than in Ireland for Ireland is a poor place and I would not live one week in it again if I had money to take me over here.

Dear Mother I should like to have you come over here very much if you think that you would be strong enough to stand the voyage. I hope you will leave that starved country and come over here in the spring. I am happy now but I should be still more happy if I could see you once more and have you hear with me. But I don't want you to come if you don't think yourself strong enough to work. I want you to write soon and let me know if you will come and if you do what about what time in the spring I may expect you. When you arrive in New York you must go to Henry Murtha's No. 7 Harvard Street New York and let me know from there by letter so that I can come to you or I'd send for you to come out here. If you don't think yourself able to come I want my sister Margaret to come. If Mother is dead I want the money to go to my sister Margaret and if so she is not it is for her and she may do what she pleases with it. I have to tell you the death of Henry Murtha's wife. She was buried on Good Friday last. I have not seen any of my comrade girls since I left New York. I have been very lonesome since I have seen no one that I knew. I was very sorry when I heard the death of Uncle Jimmy. I live in Hightstown as I said before with R.M. Smith, Esq. It is a

large family. He keeps a hotel and quite a large one too. I like it here very much indeed. I get 5 dollars a month which is two more than I got at the other place. There are 6 children and Mr. and Mrs. Smith besides all the boarders and help. The children are two girls and four boys. The babe which is a little girl has been very sick for the last three months so that we have not thought that she could live but she is getting better now. She is very fond of me and I of her. There is an nice young Irishmen in the employ of Mrs. Smith. His name is Noble Colter and there is an Irish girl living opposite here in another Hotel named Hannah

I am little acquainted with her but she appears to be very nice.

Dear Mother it will be necessary for you to take some provisions with you that you will not be likely to get on sea. They are some salt heron some fresh eggs and some potatoes. These will be all that you will need for you will get m(tear in the paper) ship of everything else than you can use.

I am anxious to know if Brother Thomas is living for I am afraid that he is dead. You will tell me in your next letter.

I was not sick on sea at all. I thought it was very pleasant until the last week or two when I became tired and began to want to see land. I hope you will fare as well as I did but I am afraid that you will not as you are more aged. I hope you will let me know when you are coming about 1-two months before you start so that I can procure you a good place nearby me. If you need more money to come well you must let me know in the next letter so that I can send it to you in time.

I want very much to send a present to my Uncle's daughter Mary but I have no way of doing so at present but hope to the next time I

send anything at home if not a present the price of one which will be just the same.

The boys get ten dollars a month for driving stage in this country so of course do not get as much as this but according to their goodness and age. Girls get from three to 8 dollars a month according what they can do. Cooks only get eight dollars a month. I get good wages for what I do.

Dear Mother you had better get you a good warm shawl a red plaid one before you come over. The different kinds of victuals that we have on the table every day are beef, pork, lamb, chicken, ducks, turkeys, veal, sweet potatoes and Irish

potatoes, cabbage, onions, beets, tomatoes, corn, beans, peas, cranberries, apples, pies, puddings and many other things too tedious to mention. The prices of eggs are a shilling a dozen, beef 10 cents a pound ham a shilling a pound, butter 14 cents, corn, oats, flour, three dollars for a hundred potatoes. Now Dear Mother I must close for I that I have written you a long latter (page tear) I am afraid that it will tire your patience. How is little Ellen? Is she still living? May love to you my Dear Mother above all and to all the rest of the family. Good bye I remain your ever loving daughter Mary Garvey.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. In the 1850s, it could take weeks or months before letters reached their intended recipients. How does Mary's letter reflect this?
2. What are the primary concerns Mary describes in the letter?
3. How does Mary describe her life in the United States?
4. What opportunities has her immigration afforded her?
5. How might the details she gives in the letter reveal what Mary values in her new home?
6. What do her warnings to her mother reveal about the trials of the voyage to the United States?
7. What does Mary say in order to entice her family to migrate to the United States? What does this show about the differences in economic mobility in Ireland compared to what she sees in the United States?

HOMEWORK

Write a letter home from your own or an imaginary immigrant living at the same time as Mary Garvey. Put yourself in their shoes. What job have you taken? What struggles have you faced since arriving in the United States? Are you hopeful or despondent? Be sure to include as many details as you can about your experience.