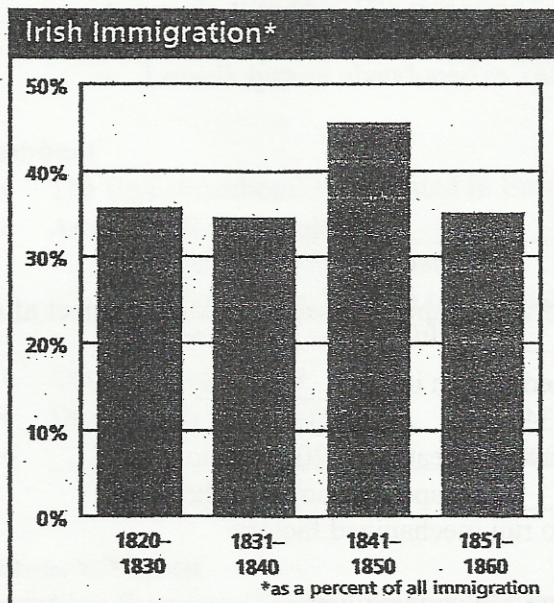


## Irish Immigration

From 1820 to 1860, immigration from Ireland to the United States was high. As the graph below shows, immigrants from Ireland equaled about a third of all immigrants in most decades of this period. They came despite facing huge obstacles, both on the journey itself and after.



Source: Roger Daniels, *Coming to America*

The Irish began to immigrate to the United States in the 1820s because Ireland had too many people for the land to support. Then, beginning in 1846, Irish immigration rose to even higher levels—because of the Great Potato Famine. This tragedy resulted from a crop disease that destroyed potatoes, a staple of the Irish diet. More than 1 million people died because of the resulting famine. To escape, many Irish had no choice but to leave their country.

However, the British did not want the Irish to go to the United States. They preferred the Irish to move to Canada, still a British colony. The British made it easier to go there than to the United States. The Irish could leave on ships for Canada from many Irish ports. To go to the United States, they

could only leave from one port in England. In addition, the fare to Canada was less than that for the passage to the United States.

There was more economic opportunity in the United States, however. So the Irish worked around these obstacles. First they went to Canada. After landing there, they took a boat—or walked—to the United States.

Although the United States had more jobs than Canada, those jobs could be hard to come by. Prejudice against the Catholic Irish was strong. Signs advertising jobs often declared, “No Irish Need Apply.”

Still, the Irish did find jobs. Men worked mainly as laborers. Thousands of Irish helped to dig the Erie Canal. Thousands more worked on the New Canal built near New Orleans. In 1850, almost two-thirds of all Irish immigrants who lived in Boston worked as laborers or as servants.

Over time, though, the Irish achieved success. It often took two or three generations for immigrant families to climb the economic ladder. By 1880, the majority of Irish in Boston had better jobs than in 1850.

Irish immigration differed from that of the Germans and Scandinavians, who also came in large numbers in the 1800s. Most of the immigrants from those areas came as families. With the Irish, one member of a family often came to the United States alone. That person worked to earn enough to bring another family member. Then the two of them worked, saving until they could bring yet others. This pattern of immigration—called chain migration—is still being followed by other groups today.