**Irish and America**

The American connection is based on such enormous numbers of Irish men and women making their way to the New World for so many different reasons that nobody is quite sure of the actual numbers involved. It is estimated that in the period between 1717 and 1775 something like a quarter of a million

Ulstermen settled in the North American continent and, between 1820 and 1920, something like four-and-a-quarter million people emigrated from Ireland to earn a living in the United States. The reasons for going were many. The Ulster folk who emigrated did so voluntarily, and were almost entirely of Presbyterian stock, seeking to escape from the Protestant Ascendancy, with which they had little or nothing in common. The early Irish from the South were often bondsmen, who had sold their services as laborers, in advance of their emigrating. The millions who went on the move went because of the famines in Ireland. They crossed the Atlantic in fearful conditions and they died in their thousands of cholera on arrival. They came in the "coffin" ships from Queenstown, from Galway and from Liverpool. They were mainly from the hardest stricken areas of the western seaboard, from Clare, Mayo, Donegal, Kerry and Cork. They were unskilled laborers who tended to herd into the cities of the east coast, and they were the men who built the railroads of America and, in the main, were the hewers of wood and drawers of water. The alternatives for the log-cabin Irish were, all too frequently, kill or be killed. They more than survived -they prospered.

They made, in many cases, vast fortunes, they gave America at least ten Presidents, if not a round dozen, and southern Ireland ultimately produced John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. The round dozen would include Richard Nixon who, on his visit to Ireland, unearthed Irish ancestors on his Milhous side, and Jimmy Carter, who can claim Irish blood from the North of Ireland on his maternal side. The Presidents from the historic counties of Ulster inc1ude Andrew Jackson, James Knox Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnston, Ulysses Grant, Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley and Woodrow Wilson. Three of them were born in Ulster, while the remainder were of Irish descent. Speaking of Irish gallantry on the American scene, perhaps it is best to draw the veil quickly over the activities of the Costelloes and the O'Bannions, the Malones and the Sheehys in the bootlegging days of Prohibition. When apprehended, they all claimed in court that they were "as white as driven snow, " for they were doing their thirsting neighbors a good turn, based on the days long ago back home when their ancestors had made "poteen" and distributed it throughout the neighboring countryside, without thought of profit. A lovable, hospitable and hardworking section of the ethnic groups that go to make up the peoples of the United States, the Irish have always and will always retain a deep love for the land of their forebears.

Once the wave upon wave of Irish emigrants had found work in America they to send remittances home to Ireland, and, of course, to encourage their relations to follow in their footsteps. The Irish laborers of the 1840s sent about a million dollars back to their homeland, andby the1870s, whenmore than tenmillion dollars was f1owing back to Ireland, the countvf s dependence on the 'Letter from America" became not only a way of life, but a means of existence, particuarly in the congested districts of the west coast conties of Ireland.

By the turn of the century, the Irish had settled in as part of the labor force, working from dawn to dusg often in appallingly bad coditions generated by New World capitalist cities. icy were shop, saloon , gamblers, prize-fighters, and railroad gangers. They were, in the ', the pick-and-shovel brigade, who began to move west as the railroad tracks were laid. They were the builders of roads and houses, and diggers of gold and silver.

They began to 611 San Francisco and Virginia City, and they were among the first to strike it rich in the new silver and gold mines of the West. Some who made it to Nob Hill became bankers and industrialists, and Nevada and Virginia City resounded with Irish names in the mid nineteenth century.